Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

PROGRESS · RUSSIAN CLASSICS SERIES

FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY
Stories

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

FYODOR
DOSTOYEVSKY

"Because I have seen the truth, I have seen it and I know that people can be beautiful and happy without losing their ability to dwell on this earth. I cannot and will not believe that evil is man's natural state." These words from "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man" perfectly convey Dostoyevsky's own attitude to the world. This collection includes best short stories: "Poor People", "White Nights", "A Most Unfortunate Incident", "A Faint Heart", and "The Dream of a Ridiculous Man", written in different years (from 1846 to 1880). The present volume will therefore present to the reader the different facets of the great master's genius. The book is illustrated with drawings by Andrei Goncharov, Merited Art Worker of the R.S.F.S.R.

Progress Publishers
Moscow

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

PROGRESS · RUSSIAN CLASSICS SERIES

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY

Stories

G.M. College of Education
Raipur, Bantalab
Jammu.
Acc. No.... 686 (D)
Dated.....17.2.10

PROGRESS PUBLISHERS
MOSCOW

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Translated from the Russian
Illustrated by Andrei Goncharov

Ф. Достоевский
ПОВЕСТИ И РАССКАЗЫ
На английском языке

G.M. Col... ...ation
Raipu... ...lab
Jam...
Acc. No.... ....
Dated ....

First printing 1971
Second printing 1975
Third printing 1977

Printed in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

Д $\frac{70301\text{-}016}{016(01)\text{-}77}$ без объявл.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

CONTENTS

DOSTOYEVSKY by Abram Belkin. *Translated by Julius Katzer* 7

POOR PEOPLE.

Translation edited by Olga Shartse and Julius Katzer 29

WHITE NIGHTS.

Translated by Olga Shartse 149

A FAINT HEART.

Translated by Olga Shartse 205

A MOST UNFORTUNATE INCIDENT.

Translated by Ivy Litvinoff. Edited by Olga Shartse 253

THE MEEK ONE.

Translated by Olga Shartse. Edited by Julius Katzer 311

THE DREAM OF A RIDICULOUS MAN.

Translated by Olga Shartse. Edited by Julius Katzer 359

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

DOSTOYEVSKY

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Portrait by Vassily Perov, 1872

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

I

It might seem that destiny itself had prepared the extraordinary circumstances of this writer's life so as to enable him to express in his works all of mankind's boundless suffering.

Such was the background of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, that genius of Russian literature which perhaps has more tragic lives to its credit than any other literature in the world. Two of its greatest poets—Pushkin and Lermontov—were killed in duels; the poet Ryleyev was hanged; the revolutionary writer Chernyshevsky languished in exile in Siberia for 20 years; Herzen, Saltykov-Shchedrin and Korolenko were sentenced to exile. However, even against this background, Dostoyevsky's life is conspicuous as a cluster of tragic circumstances. Fyodor Dostoyevsky was born in 1821, in the family of a physician at the Mariinsky Charity Hospital in Moscow. There were seven children. Dostoyevsky's mother, a delicate, religious and tender-hearted woman, died of consumption in 1837 at the age of 33. Her life was a round of suffering and anxiety owing to her husband's severity, parsimony and savage jealousy. It is characteristic of Dostoyevsky's father that his cruel treatment of his serfs during several years led to his being murdered by them in 1839 on a small estate he bought near Tula towards the end of his life. The future writer was only eighteen at the time, and some of his biographers believe that this was the cause of his first epileptic fit.

The following excerpt from the manuscript of the novel *A Raw Youth* tells us something of the young Dostoyevsky's psychology: "There are children who, from a very early age, brood over their families, who feel outraged by their fathers' unseemliness and by that of the fathers of the

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

families in their immediate environment and, above all, who begin to grasp from childhood the disorderliness and fortuitousness of the life's very foundations, the absence of established standards and family tradition."

Until the end of his days, the writer could forget neither his tormented and humiliated childhood nor the privations he suffered in his youth during his six years at the Military Engineers' School.

Dostoyevsky was racked by epilepsy all his life. It was impossible either to prevent or predict the fits which physically and mentally shattered his whole being. They could overtake the writer at any moment of his life, wherever he might be. The moment of aura takes the form of acute psychological tension accompanied by hallucinations (musical, vocal and olfactory). Medical authorities say that the patient remembers hardly anything he experiences during the fit, but Dostoyevsky's brain retained everything, as we see in the illuminating description of such an attack in *The Idiot*. His most attractive personage, Prince Myshkin, is an epileptic able to describe his mental condition during his fits.

Upon graduation from the Engineers' School, Dostoyevsky resigned his commission to devote himself to a literary career.

The immediate success of his first novel, *Poor People* (1845), brought him into close contact with the leading writers of his time, and in particular with Vissarion Belinsky, great literary critic of the 1840s, revolutionary democrat, and socialist. Dostoyevsky became passionately attracted to socialist ideas (in the way he took up anything he felt drawn to). His discussions with Belinsky, his reading of the French utopian socialists and especially Charles Fourier, his perception of the ideas expounded by Russian writers (Pushkin, Griboyedov, Lermontov, Gogol, Herzen and Nekrasov) and by Western European authors (Shakespeare, Voltaire, Schiller, Cervantes, Dickens, George Sand and Balzac) and, finally, his constant reading of the Bible—all these made a profound impression on the young writer's morbid and susceptible mind and helped mould his spiritual world. Each of the authors mentioned above not only left his mark on Dostoyevsky's consciousness but subsequently came to be reflected in his writings and imagery. There are Pushkin motifs throughout almost all of his works, right up to the extraordinarily profound "Pushkin Address" at the unveiling of the Pushkin monument in Moscow in 1880, several months before his death. Voltaire's *Candide* and Schiller's *Robbers* were transformed in the imagery of *The Karamazov Brothers*; Don Quixote rides with the hero of *The Idiot*; Dickens's

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

child characters hover behind the tormented children in Dostoyevsky's works; Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet*, first translated into Russian by Dostoyevsky and published in 1894, was closely akin to Dostoyevsky in its ideological and artistic conception.

The image of Christ is seen by Dostoyevsky as the supreme criterion of truth (The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor in *The Karamazov Brothers*).

During this period of his work, so crowded with intellectual activity, Dostoyevsky created his first novel, *Poor People*, and such stories as *The Double, White Nights*, and *The Mistress*.

Poor People, a realistic portrayal of the social tragedy of a poverty-stricken and downtrodden petty clerk, won praise from Belinsky for its deep sympathy for outraged human dignity. This was an expression of democratic and humanist ideas typical of the traditions of Russian classical literature. It was with profound psychological insight that the young Dostoyevsky showed the vacillation between rebellion against the wealthy and the powerful, and acceptance of a wretched fate. *Poor People*, a novel in letters between two people who love each other, was a lyrical confession from two miserable, unstable and lonely dreamers.

White Nights, another story of the same period, featured the colourful aspect of St. Petersburg life which came to be known as "Dostoyevsky's Petersburg". Here is how the young dreamer, the main character in *White Nights*, describes it to the girl he loves: "... There are some rather queer corners in Petersburg. The sun, which shines for all the rest of the city, never seems to peep into those places. It's another sun that does, a new one, specially ordered for those remote corners, and it throws a different, a peculiar light on everything. Life in those remote corners seems a world apart, in no way resembling the life that seethes about us; it is the sort of life that could be going on in some fabulous and strange kingdom, and not on our planet at all, in these very, very serious times of ours. And this life is that peculiar mixture of something that is purely fantastic, ardently idealistic and also, at the same time (alas, Nastenka), bleakly humdrum and ordinary, not to say incredibly banal."

Dostoyevsky shows us how the beautiful dreamers must inevitably perish in this weird atmosphere, while vulgar reality emerges triumphant. The hero and heroine of *White Nights* are granted only the strange and pathetic joy of renouncing their personal happiness.

However, this initial period of the writer's literary career was

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

brutally cut short by an event that split his life into two distinct halves. In 1847, Dostoyevsky began to attend the meetings of a progressive study circle conducted by the revolutionary socialist Petrashevsky (where he read Belinsky's banned letter to Gogol), and he later joined a group led by Speshnev, a Petrashevsky adherent who wanted to set up a secret revolutionary organisation for the struggle against the autocracy. Along with other members of the circle, Dostoyevsky was arrested in April 1849 and kept in solitary confinement in the Fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul for some eight months. When the investigation was completed, he was sentenced to death. On December 22, 1849 (he was twenty-eight years old at the time), Dostoyevsky lived through some minutes of horror. Tsar Nicholas I had decided to subject the prisoners to the cruellest torture on earth—the torture of waiting to be executed. One frosty morning, the condemned went through all the preliminaries: the drums rolled, the firing squad was drawn up, and the priest held up the crucifix for the last kiss. The prisoners were blindfolded, and the first three were led and tied to the posts, facing the firing squad. The order rang out: "Present!" The soldiers' rifle barrels were already levelled at the condemned. Dostoyevsky was in the second group, so he had no more than a minute to live. Several interminable seconds later, the tsar's order was announced commuting the death sentence to four years' hard labour and subsequent service in the ranks in a Siberian regiment.

That same day, just before being sent to serve his sentence, Dostoyevsky wrote a letter to his brother Mikhail, who stood closest to him: "My dear brother, I am not despondent and have not lost heart. Life is life everywhere.... There will be people around me: to remain a human being among them, to be always human in the face of any misfortune, to keep one's courage and not to fall—that is what life is about; that is the supreme challenge." It was these emotional experiences which, nineteen years later, gave birth to Myshkin's masterly description of the last moments of the prisoner just before his execution. In his last novel, he endowed the Karamazovs with this same unquenchable and overwhelming thirst for life. These same experiences, one may assume, whetted the lust for life which the writer himself acknowledged.

This mock execution was only the beginning of the writer's sufferings. He served four years of penal servitude in prison at Omsk, where his shackles were never removed, not even in the bath-house or the hospital. He baked bricks, carried hods to building sites, and

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

unloaded barges on the River Irtish in ice-cold water or in the bitter frost.

Notes from the Dead House, in which Dostoyevsky described his personal experience of convict life, shows the reader that this experience alone was enough to turn the writer for the rest of his life into a bard of human suffering. No nineteenth century writer apart from Dostoyevsky experienced such concentrated suffering, torment and humiliation. But this convict happened to be a genius! His interest in the problem of crime and punishment and in the psychology of victim and murderer was enhanced by his prison life.

It was there that the embryo of the parricidal plot in *The Karamazov Brothers* was conceived. The crimes, murders and suicides which crowd Dostoyevsky's works are not merely products of a writer's fertile imagination designed to thrill the reader, but themes stemming straight from the heart. Around him were murderers, rapists and sadists; thrown into their midst by blind fate, human passion, tsarist arbitrariness or legal blunders, were helpless, innocent people, many of them gifted and original. Only Dante s *Inferno* can bear comparison with *Notes from the Dead House.* Those who have experienced the horrors of the mid-twentieth century, when the nazis destroyed millions of lives in their concentration camps, cannot but find an echo of their suffering in the writings of Dostoyevsky.

The following five years of army service—first as a private and then as an NCO and commissioned officer—were somewhat easier. On returning to St. Petersburg in 1859, Dostoyevsky once again began to write, the following twenty-five years proving him to be a writer of genius and the pride of Russian and world literature. During these years, however, his private life was full of spiritual crises and tragic conflict. The epileptic fits, which he was sometimes spared for months on end, but which at times recurred daily, were a source of great torment to him. Constantly short of funds and besieged by creditors, publishers and editors, in the fifties and sixties, he began to reveal a new trait. A man of uncontrollable passions, Dostoyevsky was a desperate gambler. He counted on his good luck at the roulette table to enable him, during his visits abroad, to win a fortune outright and thereby financial independence. So great were his passion for gambling and his utter despair that, on one occasion in Baden, he actually pawned his wife's earrings and clothes. Huge winnings were, of course, invariably followed by devastating losses. Hence Dostoyevsky's consummate penetration in depicting, in his story *The Gambler,* the psychology of this consuming passion. Dostoyevsky was equally

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

passionate in his intimate life and his love of women. In 1857, in the town of Semipalatinsk, he married M. D. Isayeva, the widow of a colleague, and a sickly, hysterical woman. The marriage was not a happy one. After his first wife's death in 1865, he entered into a second marriage, which was marked by extraordinary circumstances, as were most of the other crucial moments in his life. In 1866, as a result of a harsh contract with his publishers, Dostoyevsky found himself in difficult straits, with only one month left in which to submit a 160-page novel. A friend advised him to engage the services of a stenographer. He did so, and began dictating his story *The Gambler* on October 4, 1866, finishing it twenty-six days later. The stenographer was twenty-year-old Anna Grigoryevna Snitkin, whom he married four months later. The marriage proved a happy one. Anna Grigoryevna was a devoted wife to him till the end of his days, and was instrumental in preserving Dostoyevsky's literary heritage, besides writing the best extant memoirs of his life. She also sponsored the foundation of the Dostoyevsky museum. She died in 1918 at a very advanced age.

Dostoyevsky's passionate and extraordinary life coincided with turbulent social developments in Russia and West Europe. In 1848, most European countries were swept by a wave of revolution. The old feudal fabric of Russian society was shattered by the abolition of serfdom in 1861 and the attendant emergence of new bourgeois relations in the country. Russian revolutionary Populists staged a series of terrorist acts aimed at bringing about the overthrow of the tsarist régime and accelerating Russia's revolutionary development. These attempts ended in failure and merely bolstered the reactionary régime, since the Russian peasantry was not ripe for revolutionary action. The leaders were brought to trial, the cases reverberating throughout the country.

In defining Dostoyevsky's attitude to all these events it should be remembered that he was never an artist pure and simple. In the revolutionary atmosphere of the 1859-1861 period in Russia, he became a militant journalist, publisher of the magazines *Vremya* (Time) (1861-1863), and *Epokha* (The Epoch) (1864-1865), an active editor of the journal *Grazhdanin* (The Citizen), and a keen publicist, who, in his *Diary of a Writer*, reacted to all the burning issues at home and on the international political scene. Dostoyevsky travelled abroad in 1862, 1863, 1865, and 1867-71, visiting Germany, Switzerland, Italy, England and Austro-Hungary, and describing the impressions of his travels in his *Winter Notes on Summer Impres-*

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

sions. While in Dresden in 1871, he closely followed the Franco-Prussian war and the Paris Commune. The writer's personal life was thus closely interwoven with the major social and political events of the time in Russia and Europe: the downfall of serfdom, which launched Russia on the road of capitalist development; the exacerbation of the contradictions in bourgeois society and the intensification of exploitation in Europe and, finally, the rapid spread of socialist ideas all over the world and the upsurge of the revolutionary movement.

What views did Dostoyevsky hold at the time? His years of penal servitude did not destroy his love of life and his faith in man; they enhanced his perception of human suffering. At the same time, they were years of inner crisis, disillusionment in socialist ideas, and the maturing of tragic contradictions in his ideology.

While serving his sentence, the young writer came into contact with soldiers and peasants, an experience that was a revelation to him. At the same time, he became keenly aware of the blank wall dividing the inner world of the "common people" from that of the nobility and the *raznochinets* revolutionaries, still rare in the forties and fifties, whom he knew. This sense of the gulf between the educated and the common people was to give Dostoyevsky much food for tragic thought. In the conditions of the political reaction that engulfed Europe in the fifties, Dostoyevsky became profoundly sceptical of the revolutionary movement and its possibilities. In the sixties, this put him in opposition to Chernyshevsky and other Russian revolutionary democrats.

He considered that the new bourgeois society, whose negative features had so shocked him during his travels in Western Europe, would prove utterly disastrous to Russia, as had been the developments in Europe following the French Revolution of 1789. Like Leo Tolstoi and the Russian Populists, Dostoyevsky clung to the historically utopian dream that Russia could in some way escape the "Western" pattern. He applied all his talents as writer, publicist and journalist in order to prove to thinking Russians, especially the country's younger generation, that the Russian people should follow a road of their own. The more obvious it grew, especially in the seventies, that Russia was unswervingly following the bourgeois course of development, the more obsessed he became with the need to prove the utter erroneousness of that course and the practical possibility of Russia taking a road that would bypass the horrors of the European model. This illusion of his found expression in his "Back to the soil"

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

theory, first voiced in his publicist essays appearing in his journals, and later in *The Diary of a Writer*. According to Dostoyevsky, Russia could only fulfil a "Messianic" role and bring mankind universal happiness, provided that the nobility, who had become alienated from the "soil", and the intellectuals embraced the common people, and all classes of society became united under the aegis of the monarchy and the Russian Orthodox Church. In this respect, Dostoyevsky's ideas differed from Tolstoi's theory of "simplicity" and, of course, from Populist socialism.

His refusal to admit any clash of interests between the people and the ruling classes and his efforts to contrapose to the social struggle his own "supra-class" and supposedly national ideals were the cause of profound differences between Dostoyevsky and the democratic camp.

In his view, the triumph of ethical standards was only possible on a religious basis and through the moral perfection of the individual. He wrote the following in his *Notes*: "A strongly developed individual, confident of his right to be a person and without any personal fear for himself, can use his personal qualities in no other way than by offering them to all others, so that they may become independent and happy individuals like himself."

In its broadest terms and its ultimate aims, this dream shows that Dostoyevsky stood close to the ideas of socialism. But only in the *broadest of terms* and in the *ultimate aims*. In all other respects, he differed sharply both from Western European socialist doctrines and the socialism of his compatriots—the Russian revolutionary democrats. He feared that the ideas of revolutionary struggle advocated by contemporary socialist thinking would not solve the problem of the individual's freedom as he understood it. He was horrified by the anarchists' wilfulness and the terrorist methods of struggle practised by his contemporaries—the anarchist Mikhail Bakunin and the terrorist Sergei Nechayev—who indeed did serious harm to the genuine revolutionary socialist movement.

Even only a brief sketch of the writer's biography reveals the basis of his creative work—the portrayal of the world of human suffering. This was the foundation of the complex and variegated range of characters, ideas and situations that crowd his novels, novelettes, and short stories. And it is this foundation that provides a solid and realistic basis for all the many structures of his works, however abstract, grotesque, or fantastic those structures may be.

I see Dostoyevsky's writings as a kind of huge pyramid, its broad

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Mikhail Dostoyevsky (1789-1839), the writer's father

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Maria Dostoyevsky (1800-1837), the writer's mother

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

A wing of the hospital where Dr. Mikhail Dostoyevsky's living quarters were located. Fyodor Dostoyevsky lived here between 1823-1837. At present a Dostoyevsky Museum

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Mikhail Dostoyevsky (1820-1864), the writer's elder brother

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

foundations filled with portrayals of human suffering. On this foundation rise the massive and complex problems of rebellion and submission, timidity and ferocity, with moral and political ideas growing more active. Towering at the apex are the philosophical problems of life and death, of man's place in the universe, the conflict of good and evil, of religion and atheism.

II

Dostoyevsky was a past master in the art of depicting the harsh gamut of human suffering—the anguish of the human soul and the human spirit. The corporal punishment of convicts; the violation and humiliation of woman's dignity; the maltreatment of little children by their parents and, finally, the beating of helpless animals—these jar the nerves of any reader of Dostoyevsky who is not innately callous. It will suffice to recall the flogging scenes in *Notes from the Dead House;* the agony of little Nelly in *The Insulted and the Humiliated*; Sonya Marmeladova's humiliation in *Crime and Punishment*—she has become a prostitute at seventeen to support the family of her father and stepmother; the bartering over the beautiful Nastasia Philippovna in *The Idiot;* the psychological torture to which a husband subjects his wife in *The Meek One.* This sum of human suffering is a source of unmitigated anguish to the writer, depriving him of all peace of mind and goading his principal characters to action.

Ivan Karamazov says to Alyosha: "I was going to talk about human suffering in general but it would be better to dwell on the sufferings of children alone. It will cut down the volume of my arguments by nine-tenths, but I'd rather speak only about them. I have only taken the little children to make my point obvious. I shan't say a word about the rest of mankind's tears which have saturated the earth from its crust to its centre." Ivan goes on to cite some examples. A well-bred and educated gentleman and his lady thrash their seven-year-old daughter until she loses consciousness, but his barrister justifies the father because this is merely an "ordinary family affair". A five-year-old child is locked up for the night in a latrine as punishment. A general sets his hounds on a naked child in front of its mother for having thrown a stone at his favourite dog.

As the critic Nikolai Dobrolyubov wrote, Dostoyevsky is always "in distress over Man". However, Dostoyevsky does not belong to the naturalist school, which concentrates on recording the facts. Un-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

like many other writers, he is not satisfied with merely evoking sympathy for the oppressed. He is both artist and *thinker*, driven by the spectacle of human suffering to pose the cardinal philosophical problems of mankind.

Let us return to the "pyramid" simile. It might be said that above the world of suffering lies a stratum that I would call psychological—in the main, the exploration of the human soul. There have been other writers, such as Balzac, Leo Tolstoi, and Thomas Mann, whose revealing penetration into human feelings has amazed the reader. How does Dostoyevsky differ from them as a psychologist? One of his psychological discoveries consists in his ability to show how suffering affects man's inner world, and how it changes, corrupts and even perverts the human soul.

Humiliation may evoke two diametrically opposite reactions. It reduces some people to dull submissiveness, a humble admission of their own nonentity. In others it awakens an acute and even morbid sense of individuality, of human dignity trampled underfoot.

In portraying man's humiliation, Dostoyevsky reveals abysses in the human soul that are awesome to contemplate. His characters display every kind of distorted form of self-assertion. Such psychological conditions can exist in many people in some slight or diluted measure; they do not often come to the surface. In a bourgeois or bourgeois-serfowning society (such as Russia of the 19th century), and even more so in the capitalist society of the epoch of imperialism, where humiliation of the individual (or even entire nations) reaches its highest pitch, the psychological conditions revealed by Dostoyevsky have become particularly acute. Writers of many lands have described them in the twentieth century.

Dostoyevsky magnified these movements of the soul, which he viewed, as it were, through a lens and then described in concentrated form. Any writer of genius is entitled to do this, and Dostoyevsky created a psychological and even philosophical grotesque all his own. It is significant that Dostoyevsky expressed the following idea in his *Diary of a Writer*. "Follow up some fact of real life, even one that is not so vivid at first glance, and if you have the strength and the vision, you will find in it a depth denied even to Shakespeare. But the crux of the matter is: who has that vision and capability? It is not only in creating and writing works of art that one has to be an artist in one's own way, but in being able to notice the fact."

By delving deep into the soul of the man whose dignity is trampled underfoot and by making a study of his behaviour when

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

his desires and aspirations are constantly thwarted, Dostoyevsky made artistic and ethical discoveries of great moment to Russian and to world literature. In the first place, he revealed the phenomenon of "duality", i.e., split personality, in which two mutually opposed forces, desires and qualities are combined within a human being. Secondly, he advanced the notion of the "underground", the image of "underground man".

"Duality" and the "underground" are the next layer of the metaphorical "pyramid" I have already mentioned. The psychology of duality was first explored thoroughly in *The Double* (1846), while "underground man" first appears in *Notes from the Underground* (1864). Awareness of one's insignificance coupled with the need to assert oneself creates duality in the human mind. Such duality arises in the principal character of *The Double*, the petty official Golyadkin who undergoes a morbid transformation into Golyadkin Senior and Golyadkin Junior. The former is prepared to be meek and submissive and to acknowledge his lowly status. The latter cannot allow himself to be trodden on like a mat by those over him in authority. In his flights of fancy, he is an important official who is prepared to humiliate others. He even marries his superior's daughter—something Golyadkin Senior would never even dare contemplate. This duality produces a psychology of submissiveness interlarded with rebellion. These two psychological states are also to be seen in other Dostoyevskian characters—sometimes in a single character and sometimes in different ones. There are images of the rebellious and images of the meek. In *Crime and Punishment*, Raskolnikov personifies the idea of revolt and Sonya Marmeladova that of meekness. In *The Idiot*, Prince Myshkin is the supreme personification of the philosophy of meekness and Nastasia Philippovna that of rebellion. In *The Karamazov Brothers*, Ivan symbolises rebellion, and Alyosha humility.

It should not be thought, however, that these two qualities of human nature are always distributed so obviously and symmetrically among the characters. They are sometimes unaccountably blended in a single character to express the dialectics of human behaviour, which Dostoyevsky depicts with such genius. Dualism is not a static condition but a dialectical unity which conveys the tragic struggle between the "doubles" in the soul of one and the same person. Suffice it to recall the agonising hesitation that lacerates the heart of Nastasia Philippovna when she turns from Myshkin to Rogozhin, the latter's love-hate for Myshkin, and the constant attraction and repulsion that torment Dostoyevsky's characters. Here is

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

how the writer replied in 1880 to one of his admirers, who confessed to a dualism in herself: "You write about your duality? But that is a very common feature in many people . . . only not so much in ordinary people; it is a trait inherent in human nature in general, but it very rarely occurs with such force as it does in you. The reason you are so close to me is that the *duality* in you is identical with what has been in me all my life. There is greater anguish in it, and yet there is also great joy." (*Letters,* Vol. 4, p. 137).

Thus, the problem of duality, which runs through most of his writings, was a source of anguish to him throughout the whole of his life.

The problem of duality is intimately and organically bound up in Dostoyevsky's writings with that of the "underground". In what forms is one side of the double's personality—his urge for self-assertion and rebellion—likely to manifest itself? The "underground" is the most horrible, and socially most injurious form of this urge. It is the extreme of self-centredness and individualism. At the same time, it is a terrible tragedy for the sufferer, who is acutely aware of the "underground" in himself. It will be seen that Dostoyevsky's psychological approach was different from that of Leo Tolstoi. Dostoyevsky was concerned not so much with psychological analysis as such as with the fresh possibilities it offered for realistic art. "I am called a psychologist," Dostoyevsky wrote, "but that is not true; I am merely a realist in the highest sense, i.e., I depict all the depths of the human soul."

Dostoyevsky clearly realised the significance of his artistic discovery. "I alone," he wrote, "have been able to demonstrate the tragedy of the underground, which consists in suffering, self-destruction, an awareness of a perfection that is impossible of achievement and, above all, the deep conviction in these miserable creatures that all humans are like them, so that to try to cure themselves is a waste of time. What encouragement can there be for them if they try to cure themselves? A prize? Faith? But there is nobody to give the prize and nobody to have faith in. One step further, and you have extreme vice and crime (murder)."

Let us consider the social roots of this phenomenon. The underground appears where there is overweening pride. Pride is engendered by an acute sense of personality, but the idea of personality and its rights was a legacy of bourgeois society when it was asserting itself in the struggle with feudalism. As the contradictions within capitalist society grew and developed, this great achievement revealed

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

its tragic opposite. Here is what Dostoyevsky wrote in his *Winter Notes on Summer Impressions*, after his travels in Western Europe: "And soon after this (i.e., the emergence of bourgeois society—*A.B.*), they proclaimed *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. Well and good! But what is *liberté*? It means freedom. What kind of freedom? Equal freedom for all to do whatever they wish within the framework of the law? When may one do whatever one wishes? When one possesses a million. Does freedom provide each man with a million? No. What is a man without a million? A man without a million is not one who does whatever he pleases, but one who is treated in any way it pleases others." Dostoyevsky goes on to show the hollowness of the other two slogans—equality and fraternity. As he saw it, the bourgeois emphasis on individualism precluded the achievement of brotherhood. "There is no evidence of fraternity, because what has emerged is the personal principle, that of separateness, enhanced by self-preservation and self-activity within one's own *I*." In *Crime and Punishment*, the idea of alienation is personified in Raskolnikov: "He was tormented by the sense of separateness, of disunity with mankind, which he felt immediately after committing the crime."

Thus, Dostoyevsky defined a truly tragic paradox: the full development of the individual in bourgeois society is hampered by his very sense of self as an individual. How can this contradiction be resolved? The great writer was able to reveal the main contradiction inherent in the idea of individuality—a problem bourgeois art is still grappling with. Dostoyevsky was horrified by such "freedom" of the individual, since it was nothing but a mockery of the very idea of individuality.

It should be remembered, however, that Dostoyevsky was not a philosopher engaged in building logical schemes, but an artist and a realist who thought in terms of images. He therefore studied the problem of personality in living human characters.

How, then, is the "underground" depicted in terms of images? In *Crime and Punishment*, it is personified in the image of Raskolnikov, the murderer of an old woman money-lender. His crime, committed as a test of his "underground" theory, is followed by his tragic "self-execution", as the writer called it. During his argument with court investigator Porfiri Petrovich, Raskolnikov expounds this theory as follows: "I believe only in my principal idea. It is that, by the law of nature, people are divided *mainly* into two categories: the lower one (of ordinary people), that is to say, those serving exclusively to

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

reproduce their own likenesses, and people proper, that is to say, those who have the gift or talent of bringing about some new development in their environment." What is particularly misleading and socially injurious about this theory is that it is couched in humanist terms and seems motivated by a striving for human happiness. The more sincerely its ideologists are obsessed by it, the more attractive it seems. Here is how Raskolnikov explains the idea: "It is my belief that if circumstances had prevented Keppler's or Newton's discoveries from reaching mankind otherwise than at the cost of one, ten, a hundred or more human lives that hampered those discoveries or blocked their path, then Newton would have been entitled, and even duty bound ... to remove those ten or one hundred people." The murder of the old woman is conceived in the novel as the acid test of this theory. One can imagine how much bloodshed it could justify at the hands of a fanatic not only obsessed with an idea, but given with real power to rule the destiny of nations.

Mankind's memory knows of many despots and tyrants who have forcibly "decided" the fate of nations by destroying hundreds of thousands of innocent and (to use Raskolnikov's term) "ordinary" people. Raskolnikov mentions Solomon, Lycurgus, Mahomet and Napoleon. In the nineteenth century, the Napoleonic cult was widespread not only in France but in many European countries as well. "Napoleonism" being a typical expression of individualistic bourgeois consciousness. "Heir and murderer of freedom in revolt" was how Pushkin mercilessly branded him. Swept forward on the tide of the Great French Bourgeois Revolution, with its ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity, Napoleon soon turned into an unbridled despot and conqueror, for whom the death of thousands of people was not too great a price to pay for the attainment of his ends. Raskolnikov's "underground" theory patently bears the imprint of Napoleonism.

It would be a serious mistake to identify the "underground ideas" in such characters with Dostoyevsky's own views. It is not merely a matter of these characters' ultimate downfall, since any crime against morality will inevitably meet with punishment. The crux of the matter is that the "underground" is a tragedy to those who bear it within themselves.

Raskolnikov and Ivan Karamazov both arrive at their concept of the strong personality as a result of their humanist quest. They feel sincerely for all human suffering and feverishly seek a way for mankind to achieve genuine happiness and freedom. They bear little

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

resemblance to Balzac's Rastignac or Maupassant's George Durois, though there is a superficial resemblance in their aspirations.

Noteworthy are the following words, spoken by a character in *Notes from the Underground:* "And so, long live the underground!... Ah! But I'm lying even in this! I'm lying, because I know as sure as twice two is four that it's not the underground which is better, but something quite, quite different, something I crave for but can't find! To hell with the underground!"

Thus, dualism and the underground split the hearts and minds of Dostoyevsky's characters, and there is no way out. They are indeed tragic in the sense that their built-in contradictions are quite irreconcilable, and the more intense the passions that possess them, the more inexorably they move towards disaster.

Many readers, like so many leading film directors abroad, have felt drawn by the aspect of crime and detection in Dostoyevsky's novels. Of course, the latter have their full share of murder, suicide, insanity, prison camps and crime detection. But it would be a serious mistake and a vulgar oversimplification to see his writings in this light alone. Dostoyevsky turns to murder because the very act of murder is an extreme form of the violation of moral law. A murderer is someone who has cast off the criteria of good and evil and lost all that is human in him. It is to restore society's moral laws that Dostoyevsky studies the psychology of murder and analyses crime. There is a supreme retribution in Raskolnikov and Dmitri Karamazov being sentenced to hard labour, in Svidrigailov, Kirillov and Smerdyakov committing suicide, and in Ivan Karamazov going out of his mind.

It was in this way that Dostoyevsky revealed the tragedy of bourgeois individualism and its incompatibility with the fundamentals of human morality. Dostoyevsky discerned this disease of the century more keenly than did any of his contemporaries. In his note-books of the seventies, he defined the main theme of *A Raw Youth* as follows: "The entire idea of the novel is to show that there is universal disorder in everything and everywhere in society, in its deeds and guiding principles (which for this reason are non-existent), in convictions (which are non-existent for the same reason), and in the disintegration of the family." Dostoyevsky portrayed this "universal disorder" in all his works. It is mirrored in the fate of all the characters in his novels, and ruins the most honest, sincere and noble of them. Take, for example, the fate of Nastasia Philippovna in *The Idiot*. The tragedy of this young woman of remarkable beauty, spir-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

itual endowments and passionate nature reflects the sordid relations society has forced her into. "With such beauty one could overturn the world" is how she is described in the novel. But this loveliness, whose charm and infinite strength—destructive and creative at the same time—are described by the author with great tenderness, is a quality that arouses the basest sentiments, since Nastasia Philippovna's beauty and love are commodities to be bought and sold by all those she comes into contact with. Her lover, the sensual nobleman Totsky, is prepared to pass her on to the self-centred social climber Gavrila Ivolgin with seventy-five thousand rubles cash. Crazed with lecherous passion, the merchant Rogozhin tries to buy her love for a hundred thousand rubles. Intelligent, charming and proud, she becomes the object of an undisguisedly cynical cash deal. And so all moral principles tumble to the ground. Nastasia Philippovna's rebellion and despair make the most moving and dramatic pages in the novel.

Good and evil clash in her soul. Her outraged dignity drives her into an act of despair and she flees to Rogozhin. Then her yearning for goodness attracts her to Prince Myshkin, weak-willed, trustful and touchingly naive. The struggle between good and evil in the human soul, as described by Dostoyevsky, made a tremendous impression on Albert Einstein, whose opinion of Dostoyevsky's writings is remarkable in many respects: "*The Karamazov Brothers* made a powerful impression on me. It is one of those books which smash the mechanical ideas of man's inner world and of the frontiers between good and evil."*

Dostoyevsky always felt a vital interest in the "frontiers between good and evil" in man. Even his portrayals seemed to carry an echo of these moral searchings. Let us consider Nastasia Philippovna's description, from this point of view:

"'It's a wonderful face,' the prince replied, 'and I feel sure her story is no ordinary one. Her expression is buoyant, but she has gone through terrible suffering, hasn't she? Her eyes show that, the cheek bones, those two points under her eyes where the cheeks begin. It's a proud face, terribly proud, and I can't tell whether her heart is kind.'" Describing Myshkin's thoughts when he scrutinises Nastasia Philippovna's portrait once again, Dostoyevsky goes on to say: "He felt an urge to delve into the secret of the face that had so recently

* Quoted from Ilya Ehrenburg, *Collected Works*, Vol. 9, Moscow, 1967, pp. 522-523 (in Russian).

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Fyodor Dostoyevsky in the uniform of an officer of the Siberian Infantry Battalion of the Line. Semipalatinsk, 1858

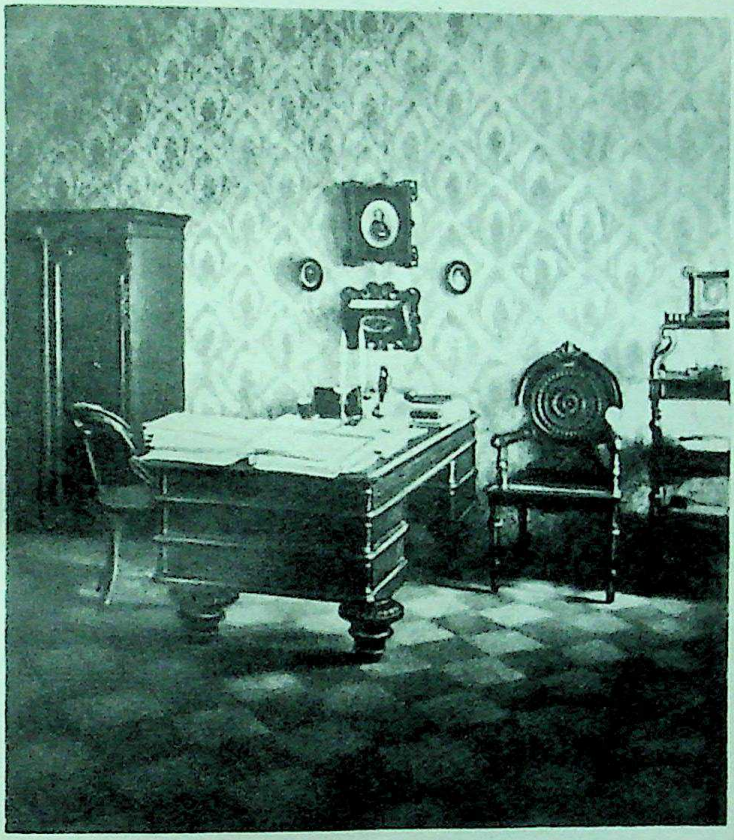
CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Anna Dostoyevsky (1846-1918), née Snitkin,
the writer's second wife. Dresden, 1857-1871

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu



Dostoyevsky's study at his last flat in St. Petersburg, 1881

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Dosteyevsky's grave at the Tikhvin Cemetery of the St. Alexander Nevsky Laura in St. Petersburg. Gravestone and bust by Nikolai Laveretsky. Erected in 1883. Photograph taken in 1897

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

evoked his amazement.... It seemed that it bore the imprint of some boundless pride and disdain, almost hatred, but at the same time it had something trustful, something surprisingly simple-hearted. This contrast, when one looked at these features, aroused even a kind of compassion."

Everything in Dostoyevsky's works—from the characterisation and the clashes in the narrative to the portrayals and artistic details—bears the impress of a social, ethical and philosophical quest. We thus see Dostoyevsky not only as a great artist but also as an outstanding philosopher.

We now come to the "centre" of Dostoyevsky's creativity, what might be considered the apex of the pyramid, i.e., the ethical and philosophical problems posed in his writings. The celebrated scene in which Ivan Karamazov tells his brother Alyosha of a child who is chased to death by hounds contains a direct transition from the theme of suffering to the social and philosophical problems of being. Ivan explains that he has chosen the suffering of children to make his point "obvious". But what is "obvious"? Why have the sufferings of children been chosen to make things "obvious"? It is the social injustice in the world that is "obvious" and, particularly, in respect of "the children, because if all must suffer to pay for eternal harmony, what has this to do with the children, I ask you?" Indeed, grown-ups already involved directly or indirectly in "the sins of this world" may be regarded as accomplices—active or passive—in the injustice of the world. But as for innocent children—why should the sins of the fathers be visited on them? "I confess in all humility that I am quite at a loss to understand why it all has to be so," Ivan admits to his brother Alyosha.

In his humanist outburst, Ivan Karamazov arrives at a negation of the contemporary social structure. If mankind has set up a world of this kind then "man is vile". But if God allows innocent children to suffer, Ivan begins to doubt Divine Providence. Like Voltaire, Ivan Karamazov explains: "It's not that I don't accept God, Alyosha, it's just that I most respectfully return Him the ticket." Alyosha has every reason to say, "But that's rebellion?" Indeed, in the name of love for humanity, both Ivan Karamazov and Rodion Raskolnikov, spiritually Dostoyevsky's strongest characters, become rebels against God and society.

But atheistic rebellion leads Dostoyevsky's characters to the anti-humanist principle that "everything is permitted". One cannot help rising up in revolt against this world of ours, but in so doing one

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

 Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

should not be guided by the cynical slogan that "everything is permitted". How is this contradiction to be resolved? In Dostoyevsky's writings, this is a crucial problem.

We see that his depiction of suffering leads Dostoyevsky to reflect on the meaning of life, the essence of the universe, the moral foundations of contemporary society, and to doubt Divine justice.

On what foundations could mankind create firm moral standards? How was human conscience to be "held in check"? These were problems of major concern to Dostoyevsky. It was here that the great writer's inner contradictions revealed themselves most clearly. The depths and the acuity with which he *posed* the problem went hand in hand with the historically utopian and conservative solutions he proposed.

In *The Legend of the Grand Inquisitor*, a philosophical insert set forth by Ivan Karamazov, we find the major social and philosophical problems in Dostoyevsky's writings expressed in a nutshell. He attacks the ideas of Catholicism, which he considers close to the ideas of materialism, atheism and socialism. To revolutionary methods of improving mankind he contraposes religious, idealistic and ethical standards, which are to be achieved through the Orthodox Church and the Gospels. When he saw the rapid spread of the socialist ideas launched in Russia by Belinsky and Petrashevsky, Dostoyevsky, contrary to the course of historical development, pinned his hopes on the monarchy, the Russian tsar. However, he could not but realise the impracticability of his aspirations. As he admitted in one of his letters: "I will tell you how it is with me: I am still a child of the times, a child of unbelief and doubt, and I know that I shall remain so till the grave. What fearful torment this thirst to believe has cost me, and the more arguments I find to the contrary, the stronger it becomes in my soul."

Dostoyevsky's contradictions also made themselves manifest in the characters through which he attempted to express his positive ideals.

In *The Idiot*, his ethical ideal finds supreme expression in Prince Myshkin.

Dostoyevsky's meek characters are embodiments of genuine morality, goodness and humanism. Meekness should not be equated to human weakness and lack of moral fibre. Sonya Marmeladova, Alyosha Karamazov and Myshkin are not weaklings who have submitted to the evils of the world. Their strength lies in their religion-ground-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

ed conviction, their willingness to suffer for all mankind, their faith in the immortality of the soul. To all of them Christ is the criterion of morality.

Prince Myshkin, whom Dostoyevsky saw as the Russian variation of the immortal Don Quixote, charms everyone with his moral purity, his trust in people, his respect for every man and woman, and his ability to discern the best qualities in people. The image of Myshkin was very precious to Dostoyevsky. Here is what he wrote about his concept of the novel: "The main idea in the novel is to depict a positively excellent human being. There is nothing more difficult on earth, especially at present."

However, the tragedy of Myshkin, as of all his other "meek" characters, lay in the incompatibility between the ideal and the realities of life. To all the religious, kindly and meek characters he created, Dostoyevsky might have replied in words addressed to Myshkin by one of the characters in the novel: "Heaven is a difficult business, Prince, far more difficult than it seems to your kind heart." The charm of Myshkin's moral purity stems from his absolute trust in and respect for people, his ability to perceive their best qualities. It is this that attracts everybody he meets. He is child-like in his simplicity of heart, but at times he reveals a keen-sighted wisdom. He possesses the gift of seeing through people. With him, people, both good and evil, do not wish to be hypocritical; they open their hearts to him. He wins their hearts by his unfettered and boundless trustfulness. His misfortune, however, lies in his inability to bring happiness to those who love him and believe in him. He cannot save any of them from grief or death, neither Rogozhin, Aglaia, nor Nastasia Philippovna. In a society rent by antagonistic contradictions, he may seem ridiculous and tragic at the same time, like Don Quixote de la Mancha. There is a profound significance in Dostoyevsky presenting his charming character as an "idiot", a mental case. There is a tragic paradox here: one has to be insane to preserve one's faith in goodness and one's trust in people in a world pervaded by avarice, selfishness and venality. The great writer himself thirsted after that faith. In *A Ridiculous Man's Dream,* the main character dreams of universal human happiness, the author sharing the dream. In *A Raw Youth,* Versilov, too, shares that dream: "A wonderful dream, mankind's supreme misconception—the golden age—the most impracticable dream of all times, but one for which people have sacrified life and energy, prophets have suffered and died, and without which nations do not want to live and cannot even die."

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Dostoyevsky has faith in man and his future. His boundless love of life is forcefully expressed in a dialogue between Ivan and Alyosha in *The Karamazov Brothers*:

" 'I love the sticky leaves and the blue skies of spring! It's not with the mind, or through logic but with one's inner self, one's guts that one loves them, loving all one's fresh-born young strength.... Do you get any of this gibberish of mine, Alyosha?'

" 'Only too well, Ivan: it is indeed with the inner self, with one's guts that one wants to love—how well you've put it, and I'm terribly glad you have such an overwhelming desire to live.... I believe everyone must above all learn to love life.'

" 'To love life more than its meaning?'

" 'Indeed, yes. To love it more than logic, as you've put it. Undoubtedly before logic, it's only then that I'll understand what it really means.' "

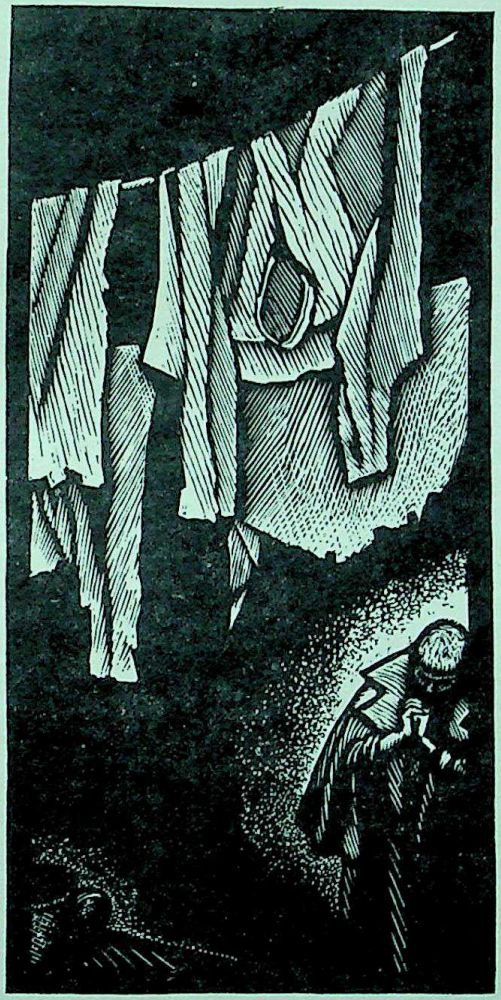
Dostoyevsky's supreme aspiration to see all human suffering done away with and justice prevail was worked into a fantastic vision dreamed by Dmitri Karamazov, that most passionate and life-loving of his characters. When, in his dream, Dmitri saw charred village huts, starving peasant women, and a starving baby blue with cold and crying in its mother's arms, he felt a passionate urge "to do something so that the child should stop crying, and the filthy, emaciated mother should stop crying, there should be no more tears anywhere ever again, and that this should be done now, immediately, without delay, at all costs...."

Dostoyevsky's heart and mind were a battlefield where religion and atheism clashed, suffering was exalted and rejected, submission and revolt were contrasted, fear of revolution went hand in hand with an intense interest in the ideas of socialism, and thoughts of the inevitability of evil, perversion and suffering did not overshadow the dream of a wonderful and harmoniously developed people living on a transformed and happy earth.

A. Belkin

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu



POOR PEOPLE

A Novel

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education,Bantalab Jammu

Oh, those story-tellers! Can't they write something useful, pleasant, and enjoyable? No! They must rake up all the dirt. I would forbid them to write altogether. What is the good of it? You read what they write and can't help reflecting—and all sorts of drivel comes into your head. I would simply forbid them to write altogether, I really would!

PRINCE V. F. ODOYEVSKY

April 8

My precious Varvara Alexeyevna,

I was so happy last night, so impossibly happy! For once in your life, my obstinate darling, you did as I asked. It was eight in the evening when I awoke (as you know, my dear, I like to take a nap after work). I fetched a candle, laid out my papers and was just trimming my pen when I happened to look up and—how my heart did leap! So you understood what I wanted, what my poor heart desired! The corner of your curtain was fastened to the balsam pot just as I had suggested. It seemed to me even that your dear face appeared at the window, that you were peeping out, thinking of me. And how sorry I was, my little dove, that I could not see your sweet face clearly. Ah, there was a time when I too could see well. Old age is no blessing, my dear: everything is hazy, and a little writing in the evening makes one's eyes so sore and tearful in the morning that one is ashamed to be seen by strangers. But your smile, my little angel, your sweet smile simply glowed in my imagination! And I felt as I did the time I kissed you, remember? I even fancied that you shook your finger at me. Did you, you naughty child? You must tell me all about it in your next letter.

And what do you think of our trick with the curtain, Varenka? Precious, isn't it? When at work, going to bed, or waking, I at once know that you are thinking of me over there, that you remember me, that you are well and cheerful. Dropping the curtain means: "Good night, Makar Alexeyevich!" And raising it means: "Good morning, Makar Alexeyevich, I hope you've slept well," or "How do you feel, Makar Alexeyevich? As for me, I am well, praise the Lord!" See, how it works, dearest; it makes even letters

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

unnecessary! Clever, isn't it? And I thought it up myself! I am good at such things, don't you think?

Then, I may tell you, my dear Varvara Alexeyevna, that contrary to expectations, I slept very well all night, which is very satisfactory. One never sleeps well in new places. If it isn't one thing, then it's another to keep you awake. I got up this morning as cheerful and fresh as a lark. And what a morning it was, my dear! The window was throw open, the sun was shining, birds were singing, there was the fragrance of spring in the air and all of nature was coming alive—and everything else was in harmony too, everything as it should be in the spring. I even did some pleasant musing this morning, and all about you, my dear. I compared you to a little bird in the sky created for the solace of man and the adornment of nature. Here, it occurred to me, Varenka, that we humans living in care and worry, ought to envy the carefree and innocent birds in the heavens—and so on in this vein, drawing various abstract and pleasing comparisons. I have a book, Varenka, and in it you will find very many things of this kind, and in great detail too. There are all sorts of dreams, my dear, and I can't help writing about them. Now that it is spring they are so exciting, pleasant and fanciful, so tender, and all in a rosy hue. That is why I am writing like this. But to tell you the truth, I got it all from the book. The author's longing is so like my own, and all in verse:

Were I but a bird, a soaring bird of prey!

And so it goes on; and there are other ideas too. But never mind! Better tell me where you went this morning, Varvara Alexeyevna. I was not nearly ready to go to work when you came fluttering from your room so cheerfully. It was a joy to look at you! Ah, Varenka, Varenka! Don't grieve, tears won't help. Believe me, my darling, I know it from experience. And besides, you have peace now, and your health is better. And how is Fedora? What a good woman she is! Write to me, Varenka, and tell me how you get on together. Is everything satisfactory? Fedora grumbles a little, but you mustn't mind. She is such a good woman, God bless her.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

I have already written about our Theresa—she is a good and honest woman too. I was so worried—how would we pass our letters to each other? And here, God sent us Theresa. She is a kind soul, so meek and obliging. But our landlady is merciless and works her to the bone.

What a place I have come to, Varvara Alexeyevna, a regular slum! What a house! I used to live like a hermit, as you know: it was so peaceful and quiet that you could hear a fly flitting across the room. And here there is noise, shouting, an uproar. But I didn't tell you what the place is like. Just imagine a long corridor, very dark and dirty. To the right there is the blank wall, and on the left a row of doors like in a hotel, rooms tenanted by one, two or three persons. You mustn't expect any order here, it's a real Noah's ark! And yet, they seem to be good people, well bred and educated. One of them is a clerk (somehow, connected with literature), a well-read man who knows a good deal about Homer, Brambeus* and all sorts of other writings, and about everything—an intelligent man. Then there are two army officers who are always playing cards, also a naval officer, and an English tutor. But wait for my next letter, dearest. To amuse you, I shall describe them satirically, just as they are and in detail. Our landlady is a very small and slovenly old woman who goes about in a dressing-gown and slippers and keeps shouting at Theresa all day. I live in the kitchen, or rather it is this way: right next to the kitchen there is a room (and our kitchen, I must say, is a very good one, clean and bright); the room is not large, just a cubby-hole . . . or I had better say that the kitchen is large and has three windows and a bit has been partitioned off to form another room, an extra lodging as it were. It is roomy, comfortable, and has a window. And here I live. In short, it is all very satisfactory. Now don't think there's some hidden meaning in all this, my darling, that there's something shocking in it being the kitchen! I do live in that room behind the partition, it doesn't matter—I have my privacy, I keep to myself, live quietly and alone. For furniture I have a bed, a table, a

* *Baron Brambeus*—the pen-name of O. I. Senkovsky, a miscellaneous writer popular in the forties.—*Ed.*

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

chest of drawers, and two chairs. Also, I have put up an icon. True, there may be better rooms than mine, far better perhaps, but the main thing is convenience, isn't it? And so I have done it all for convenience, and don't think for a moment that I had anything else in mind. And your window is just across the courtyard, and the courtyard is narrow, and I can see you pass, and it brightens up the days of a lonely man. And it's cheaper too! The most wretched room in the house costs thirty-five rubles with board—more than I can afford. Now my room costs twenty-four and a half with board, while I used to pay a full thirty and had to deny myself many things. Before, I could not always afford tea, and now I've saved enough for both tea and sugar. Somehow I am ashamed to do without tea, my dear; everyone is well-to-do here and it is embarrassing. That is why one drinks tea, dearest; because of the others, for the sake of appearances, for good tone. If not for this I would not care, I am not the fussy sort. And if you put some money aside for emergencies, for shoes, or some bit of clothing, what will remain? And there goes the whole of my salary. It is not that I'm complaining. It is enough. I have been earning enough for several years now, and sometimes I receive bonuses as well.

Well, good-bye, my angel. I have bought a few pots of balsam and geraniums for you—it didn't cost much. And perhaps you are fond of mignonette? They have mignonette too—you just write to me, but please set everything down in greater detail. And by the by, my dearest, have no thoughts or doubts on my account because I have rented such a room. It was convenience which made me do this, nothing but convenience. I am saving money, dear heart, I have a bit put away. I may appear so timid that a fly could knock me down with its wing, but come to think of it, I am not like that really, I know what I'm about: I have the character of a man who is firm and serene of soul. Good-bye, my little angel! I find that I have written two full sheets, and I should have gone to work long ago. I kiss your fingers, my darling, and remain

Your most humble servant and truest friend,

Makar Devushkin

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

P.S. There's one thing I beg of you: write to me, dear, as fully as possible. I'm sending you a pound of sweets, Varenka, I hope you'll enjoy them, and for the love of God feel no uneasiness about me. And so, once again, good-bye, my darling.

April 8

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

I am afraid I shall have to quarrel with you after all. I assure you, my good Makar Alexeyevich, that it is really difficult for me to accept your presents, knowing as I do what they have cost you, what sacrifice, what self-denial. How many times have I told you that I need nothing, absolutely nothing? You know that I cannot repay the kindnesses you shower upon me. Why have you sent those flowers? A pot of balsam would not have been so bad, but why the geraniums? One has only to say an unguarded word, as I did about geraniums, and off you go to buy them! And they must have been expensive. But the flowers are lovely—little crimson crosses. Wherever did you get them? I have put them in the most conspicuous place at the window. I shall also put a bench beneath, and on the bench more flowers—just wait till I'm a little richer. Fedora never gets tired of looking at them. It is heavenly here now—so clean and bright. But why the bonbons? I knew at once from your letter that there was something wrong—too much of paradise, and spring, and fragrance, and singing birds. I was sure there would be poetry too. You should have written some verses, Makar Alexeyevich! The rest was all there—the tender feelings, the rosy dreams and what not! As for the curtain, I never meant it. It probably got caught when I set the plants down. So there!

Ah, Makar Alexeyevich! No matter what you say or how you try to convince me that all of your money is spent for your own needs, you cannot conceal anything from me. I can see that you deny yourself bare necessities for my sake. Whatever made you rent such a room, where there is no peace and quiet, where you are cramped and uncomfortable? You are fond of privacy, the one thing you will not find there. And you could live far better, too, judging

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

by your salary. Fedora says that you used to live much better. Can it be that you have spent all your life alone, in want and gloom, with never a friendly word, in odd corners rented from strangers? My kind friend, how my heart aches for you! But at least try to keep well, Makar Alexeyevich. You say that it hurts your eyes to write by candle light. Then why do so? Surely, your employers know how diligent you are as it is.

Once more, I implore you not to spend so much money on me, I knew you love me, but you are not rich. This morning I too rose in good spirits. I felt so very cheerful. Fedora had been at work for a long time, she had brought work for me too. This made me so happy; I went out to buy some silk and then took up my work. All morning I felt light-hearted and cheerful. But now I'm sad again and my heart is heavy.

What is to become of me? What awaits me in the future? It is so depressing to be uncertain, to have no prospects or even a faint idea of what will happen. And the past was so awful that the mere thought of it breaks my heart. To the end of my days I shall have a bitter plaint against those wicked people who wrecked my life.

But it is growing dark and I must set to work. I should have liked to write much more, but there is no time: the work is urgent and I must hurry. It is good to write letters, of course; one is not so lonely. But why don't you ever come to us? Why not, Makar Alexeyevich? You have not far to go and surely you can find the time for this. Please, do come! I have just seen your Theresa. She was looking so ill and I felt so sorry for her that I gave her twenty kopeks. Oh, I have almost forgotten: please, give me a full account of the way you live. What sort of people live with you and how do you get on with them? I should very much like to know. See that you set it all down. Tonight I shall purposely loop up the corner of my curtain for you. Go to bed earlier—last night I saw your candle burning until nearly midnight. Well, good-bye! Today's a sad, dull, miserable day. It's simply that sort of day. Good-bye.

Your friend,

Varvara Dobrosyolova

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

April 8

My dear Varvara Alexeyevna,

Yes, dear heart, yes, it was a bad day to fall to my miserable lot. You have surely had your laugh at me, the old fogey, Varvara Alexeyevna! But it is my fault, my own entirely. An old man with a tuft of hair on his bald pate, dallying with cupids and sentiments! Yet, I'll say this, dearest: man is a strange creature sometimes; he will talk such frightful nonsense and go to such lengths—good heavens! And what comes of it all, what follows? Nothing at all, except such rubbish from which the Lord preserve us! I'm not angry, dear heart, but simply annoyed to think that I should have written to you in that stupid and flowery manner. Today I went to work happy as a king. There was such a radiance in my heart, a holiday in my soul. In short, I did feel jolly! At first I took to my papers zealously enough, but later, when I looked about, everything was as drab and bleak as before. The ink spots were the same, the tables and the papers, and I too was the same. Then why had I climbed on to the back of Pegasus? What had made me do such a thing? Because the sun had shone upon me and turned the sky to blue? What sort of fragrance could there have been when any sort of garbage may lie about in the courtyard under our windows. It must have come from my foolish fancy: one may stray so far as to forget oneself completely—out of sheer excess of foolish ardour. But on the way home, this evening, I dragged myself along rather than walked. Besides, for some reason or other, my head began to ache. One thing always comes upon another. Perhaps the wind had chilled my back: I was so glad it was spring that, fool that I was, I had gone out only in a thin service coat.

Let me say that you have mistaken my feelings, you have misunderstood them altogether. It was fatherly affection, pure fatherly affection, Varvara Alexeyevna. In your lonely orphanhood I have taken the place of your father. I say this in all sincerity, as a true relative should. I am after all a distant relative of yours, am I not? A very, very distant relative, of course, but a relative just the same —and now I happen to be your closest relative and pro-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

tector, because where you should have received help and protection you found treachery and insult. As for verses, I may say, my dear, that it is not seemly for a man of my age to indulge in poetry-making. Poetry is trash. Little boys nowadays get spanked for it in school. That is what I think of it, my dear.

Why do you write about comfort and peace and all the rest, Varvara Alexeyevna? I am not finicky and need little. I have never been better off than now. Why should I be so particular in my old age? I have enough to eat, some clothes and shoes, and who am I to want extravagances? I'm not of a princely stock. No, my father was not of the nobility. He kept a family on an income lower than mine. Nor am I a molly-coddle! Yet, if the truth be told, my old place was much better. I felt more at home there, my dear. My present room is good enough, of course, and in some respects more cheerful and, if you like, more lively. I can't say anything against it, but I miss the old room just the same. We old people, that is, elderly people, grow attached to things. The room was small, you know, and the walls. . . . Well, the walls were, of course, like any other walls. Walls are nothing. It is the memories that make me sad. Strange that they should make me so miserable because they are quite pleasant in themselves. Even the things that were bad and once annoyed me now seem good and pure. We used to live there so quietly, I and the old lady who is now dead. Thinking of her makes me sad too. She was a good woman and never overcharged for her rooms. She was always knitting bed covers from strips of different cloth with yard-long knitting needles. We shared the same candle and so worked at the same table. Her little granddaughter Masha—I still remember her as a baby—must be a girl of thirteen now. What an imp she was, always up to something, and how she made us laugh. And that is how we lived together, the three of us. During the long winter nights we would have tea at the round table and then set to work. To amuse the child and keep her out of mischief, the old lady would tell stories. And what stories they were! Not only a child, but a grown-up and sensible person too could forget himself listening. Even I sat there smoking a pipe and listening until I forgot

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

all about my work. And the child, that little piece of mischief, would rest her rosy face on her hand, her pretty mouth half-open. And if the story was at all frightening she would press closer to her grandmother. How we loved to look at her then! And there we sat forgetting to snuff our candle, deaf to the wind and maybe the snow-storm blowing outside. Yes, it was a good life, dearest, and we lived together like that for nearly twenty years. But I'm carried away. The subject, perhaps, does not interest you at all and I find it none too easy to recall, especially now. It is growing dark. Theresa is fussing with something or other; my head aches and my back hurts a little, and my thoughts are so odd and rambling as if in pain too. I am sad today, my dear.

But what are you saying, my dear? How can I come to visit you? What will people say? If I cross the courtyard there will be questions, talk and gossip. They will misinterpret everything. No, my little angel, I had better see you tomorrow at Vespers—that will be better and less harmful to us both. Please forgive me for writing a letter like this, my dear: reading it again I see that it is all made up of odds and ends. I am an old man, my dear, old and ignorant. When I was young I learned very little and now nothing will stay in my mind even if I should try to learn from the beginning. I dare say I am no master at describing things; and without being told or laughed at, I know that whenever I try to put things down in a more fanciful way, I only manage to scratch together a heap of nonsense. I saw you at the window today—drawing down the blind. Good-bye, good-bye, and may God keep you. Good-bye, Varvara Alexeyevna.

Your devoted friend,

Makar Devushkin

P.S. I cannot write satirically any more about anyone, dearest. I am too old to jeer, Varvara Alexejevna! And people would laugh at me and remember the old Russian proverb that he who digs a pitfall for his neighbour shall fall into it himself.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

April 9

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

Are you not ashamed to give way to such moods and tantrums, my friend and benefactor? Could I really have hurt you? I know I'm often thoughtless, but I never imagined that you would take my words as a mean jest at your expense. I assure you that I could never make fun of your age or character. It is simply my thoughtlessness, and still more that I am terribly bored; and what doesn't one do out of boredom? To tell you the truth, I supposed that you had been joking in your letter. I was terribly upset when I saw that you were so displeased with me. My friend and benefactor, you will wrong me if you suspect me of unfeelingness and lack of gratitude. I do appreciate all you have done for me by protecting me from my enemies, from their hatred and persecution. I shall always pray for you—and if God hears my prayers, you will be happy.

I'm quite unwell today; I feel hot one minute and shivery the next, and Fedora is worried. You should not be ashamed to come and see me, Makar Alexeyevich. Let people mind their own business. We are well enough acquainted, aren't we? Good-bye, Makar Alexeyevich—I have said all that there is to say and am too unwell to write more. Again, don't be angry with me and be assured of the constant respect and attachment of

Your most devoted and humble servant,

Varvara Dobrosyolova

April 12

My dear Varvara Alexeyevna,

What is the matter? What is wrong? You're always frightening me! In every letter I plead with you, beg you to be more careful, wrap yourself well, stay at home in bad weather, be sensible in all things. But you won't listen, my darling angel, you're as bad as a little child. I know you're as frail as a blade of grass, that you catch cold at

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

the slightest puff. You must be careful, dearest, and look after yourself, and avoid everything dangerous, and spare your friends the grief and worry.

You wanted to know all about my daily life and surroundings? With the greatest of pleasure, my love. But let me begin at the beginning. The stairs at the front of the house are quite elegant, especially the main stairway: it is bright, clean, and wide, and the banisters are all mahogany and metal work. But of the back stairs, the less said the better: they twist about, damp and dingy, and the steps are all crumbling, and the walls are so grimy that your fingers stick when you touch them. Every landing is piled high with boxes, chairs and old wardrobes and there are lines of washing. Most of the windows are broken and everywhere there are tubs filled with dirt, litter, egg shells and fish bladders. And the smell is abominable... In a word, it isn't nice.

As for the rooms, I told you how they are arranged: convenient enough, but a little, well—stuffy. I don't mean to say that they actually smell bad—they merely give off a sickly sweet odour. At first it is annoying, but you grow used to it in a few minutes because everything here smells—even your clothes, and hands. But the canaries soon die. The naval officer who lives here has just bought his fifth—they just can't stand the air. It's a bit sour in the morning when the fish and meat are cooking and the kitchen is sloppy; but in the evening it is heavenly. The kitchen is bright and large and is full of old washing hung out to dry and the smell is a little bothering since my room adjoins. But never mind, one can get used to it if one lives here long enough.

The house is astir from earliest dawn: everybody is getting up, walking and stamping about. Some have to go to work and those who don't get up just the same. First we all have our tea. Most of the samovars belong to the landlady and since there are not enough of them, each has to wait his turn. If anyone comes along with his kettle out of turn the entire company will pounce upon the culprit. It happened to me, too, the first time—but that is not worth mentioning. It was on that occasion that I got acquainted with everyone. The naval officer was the first. He is a

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

confiding soul and told me all about his father, mother, and sister (who is married to an official in Tula) and about the town of Kronstadt. He offered me his protection and then and there invited me to tea. I found him in a room where card playing never ends. After tea they insisted that I should join them, seriously or not I cannot say. They had been playing all night and were still at it when I entered. They were engrossed in their cards, there was chalk dust everywhere, and the smoke hung so thick that it made your eyes smart. When I refused to gamble, I was told to stop talking philosophy. After this no one spoke to me at all. And to tell the truth, I didn't mind. I won't go there any more. Gamblers, that's what they are, gamblers! The writer also arranges parties in his room. But here it is all very innocent, respectable, delicate, and on a high level.

To this I may add, Varenka, that our landlady is a vicious old woman, a proper witch. You've seen Theresa and know how thin she is: like a plucked chicken. There are only two servants—Theresa and Faldoni. Perhaps Faldoni has some other name, but he answers to Faldoni. And so everyone calls him Faldoni. He is a red-haired, cross-eyed lout with a pug nose and always wrangling with Theresa—they nearly come to blows. On the whole, I would say that life here is not so pleasant. There is no such thing as bedtime here, when all would grow quiet and you could go to sleep. In one room or another they are sure to be playing cards; and sometimes there are goings-on of which I am ashamed to speak. I've grown used to it myself, but can't help wondering how the family people can bear to live in such a bedlam. There is a poor family in the room on the other side of the hall, a corner room somewhat apart from the others. They are quiet folk, no sound or sight of them behind their partitions. The man, Gorshkov by name, is an unemployed clerk who was discharged for something or other seven years ago. He is a little grey man and his clothes are so shabby and ill-kept that it hurts to look at him. His coat is even worse than mine, a sad little stick of a man! (We meet in the corridor at times). His knees are wobbly and his hands and head are also shaky, from some sickness or God knows what! He is a timid, frightened man, and keeps out of everyone's way. I

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

too may seem bashful at times, but he is even worse. He has a wife and three children. The eldest boy is as puny as his father. The wife must have been pretty once—one can see it even now. But she is clothed in rags, poor thing. They are behind with their rent, I have heard. The landlady, at any rate, is not very kind to them. I have also heard that Gorshkov got into some trouble or other which was why he lost his post: he was accused of something, maybe he was put on trial, or maybe he was under examination; I can't say for sure. But they are poor, God, how poor! There is never a sound from their room, as though not a soul lived there. Even the children can't be heard. I have never seen them run about or play. A bad sign! As I passed his door one evening when the house was unusually still, I heard a sob, then a whisper, and another sob. Someone seemed to be weeping so pitifully that it wrung my heart. I kept thinking about them all night and could not fall asleep.

Well, good-bye, Varenka, my priceless friend. I have described everything as well as I could. I have been thinking of you and you alone all day. I'm so worried about you, I know you need a warm coat for these Petersburg springs with their winds and their rains and their snows —they'll be the death of me, I know, Varenka. God save us from this mellow season! Don't be angry, dear heart, for the way I write. I have no style, none at all. I wish I had. I write what comes to my mind in the hope of cheering you a little. If I had had a decent education, it would be different. But what sort of an education did I have, a kopek's worth not more!

Your constant and faithful friend,

Makar Devushkin

April 25

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

Today, I met my cousin Sasha! It was awful! She is going to ruin! Rumours have reached me, too, that Anna Fyodorovna has been making inquiries about me. Will

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

she ever leave me alone? She wants to *forgive* me, to let bygones be bygones and intends to call upon me soon. She claims that you are no relative of mine, that she is closer to me, that you have no right to meddle in our family affairs, and that I ought to be ashamed to be living on your charity and support. She says that I have forgotten her hospitality, that it was she who saved my mother and me from starvation, that for two and a half years she was put to great expense feeding us, and above all that she was quite willing to forgive our debts. She did not spare even my poor mother. If Mama could know what they did to me! But God sees all! Anna Fyodorovna says that I have myself to blame for the loss of my happiness, that she showed me the way, and that it is no fault of hers that I could not or perhaps would not save my reputation. Then whose fault is it, dear God! She says that Mr. Bykov is quite right and that no man can be expected to marry a woman who.... What is the good of writing about this? It hurt cruelly to hear that lie, Makar Alexeyevich! I am in a terrible state. I sit here, trembling, sobbing and weeping. It took me two hours to write this letter. I was sure she would at least acknowledge how she has wronged me. But there you are! And don't worry, my one and only benefactor! Fedora always exaggerates. I am not ill. It is only a slight chill that I caught yesterday when I went to Mass at Volkovo. Why didn't you come with me? I had begged you to. Ah, my poor, dear Mama—if you could rise from the grave, if you could know and see what they have done to me!

V. D.

May 20

Varenka, my dove,

I am sending you some grapes, dear heart, because grapes are good for convalescents. The doctors too recommend them to quench thirst—and that is why I've sent them, just against thirst. Yesterday you wanted some crullers. And so, I've sent you some. How is your appetite, darling? That is the main thing. Thank God that it is all over and our troubles are coming to an end. Let us thank

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

heaven for that. As for the books, I haven't been able to get them yet. They say there is a very good book here, very beautifully written. A good book, they say. I haven't read it myself, but everyone praises it and they have promised to lend it to me too—but will you read it? You are so hard to please—it is difficult to suit your taste. I know that well enough, my dear. You probably want something poetic, something full of sighs and love. I'll get it for you, never fear. There's a notebook of copied verses.

As for me, I'm quite well. So please don't worry, dear heart. And pay no attention to what Fedora says. Tell her she is an old gossip. Just tell her so! I have not sold my new uniform. And why should I? Whatever for? I have heard that I am going to receive a bonus of forty rubles. Why should I sell it then? So don't worry, my darling. Fedora, you know, is so fussy, so fussy and nervous. There are happy days to come! Only do get well, my angel. Get well for the love of God, don't sadden your old friend. Who told you that I've grown thin? It's gossip again, just slander! I'm as healthy as can be and have grown so stout that I'm actually ashamed of myself—in short, I'm living in clover. If only you would get well! Now, good-bye, my angel. I kiss your fingers one by one and ever remain

Your eternal friend,

Makar Devushkin

P.S. Really, my love, why are you writing on the subject again? Be reasonable! How can I come to visit you so often? How can I do such a thing? You can't expect me to come except under cover of dark. How can you, my dear? And what darkness is there left of the nights in this season? And when you were so ill and your mind was wandering I scarcely left your bedside. I hardly know how I managed. But I had to stop coming because of the talk and the gossip. Even so the tongues are already wagging. I completely trust Theresa—she is not a gossip. But just imagine what it would be like if they knew more about us, what they would think and what they would say! Have patience, dear heart, and wait till you get well. We'll have our rendezvous then.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

June 1

My esteemed Makar Alexeyevich,

I so wanted to do something to please you for all the affection you have shown me, that I at last decided to rummage my chest of drawers and find this old copybook which I am sending you. I began it in happier days and continued it at intervals. You often asked me about the past, about my mother, about Pokrovsky, and my life with Anna Fyodorovna, and finally about the more recent troubles. You were so eager to read these notes, in which, I don't know why, I described—whenever I had time—various moments in my past life, that I am sure they will give you pleasure. As for me, I am saddened when I read them. I seem twice as old to myself as I was when I wrote the last lines. Good-bye, Makar Alexeyevich. I'm so weary and lonely and suffer from sleeplessness. What a boring convalescence.

V. D.

I

I was fourteen when my father died. My childhood was the happiest time in my life. My father was the steward of the vast estate of Prince P. in the Gubernia of T. And there we lived happily and quietly in one of the villages of the prince, far, far from here. I was a restive child, always running about the gardens, the meadows and the woods, and no one looked after me. Father was always busy with the affairs of the estate, and mother with housekeeping so that I was left to myself. There was no one to teach me and I was the happier for it. Early in the morning I would run to the pond, to the grove, to the haymakers or to the reapers—never mind if the sun was scorching or I had roamed far from the house, whether I had scratched my hands and face in the bushes and torn my dress. They would scold me for this at home afterwards but I didn't give a care.

I should have been happy to spend all my life in that village, but it was ordered otherwise: I was still a child, twelve years old, when we moved to St. Petersburg. It

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

hurts me to remember how we made ready for the journey, how I wept as I took leave of everything so dear to me, how I hung on my father's neck pleading to stay a little longer. Father was annoyed and shouted at me. Mother wept and said that we had to go because of Papa's affairs. The old Prince P. had died and his heirs dismissed my father. He had invested a little money with private persons in St. Petersburg and now thought that his presence in the capital would improve our circumstances. My mother told me of this afterwards. Arrived in the capital, we settled in the Petersburg Side where we stayed until my father died.

How hard it was to get used to the new life. We arrived in the city in the autumn. We left the village on a bright sunny day; it was warm and gay. The field work was nearly done. The threshing floors were stacked with grain and the birds fluttered noisily overhead. Everything was so bright and joyous. And when we arrived in the city there was nothing but rain, the rawness and slush of autumn under a gloomy sky. There were crowds of strangers, inhospitable, hostile and morose. But eventually we settled down—I remember how everyone bustled about and fussed, setting up a new household. Papa was hardly ever at home, and Mama never had a quiet moment. I was completely forgotten. And how sad it was on that first morning after our arrival! Our windows opened upon a yellow fence and the mud in the street below was never dry. There were few passers-by, and all huddled in their coats because it was so cold.

Our home too was oppressive and dreary all day. We had scarcely a relative or a friend. Father was not on speaking terms with Anna Fyodorovna (he owed her some money). Our frequent visitors were his business associates who usually wrangled, argued and shouted. Such visitors always left him down-hearted and out of temper. For hours on end he would pace the room brooding. Mama was afraid to speak to him then, and I too would sit as quiet as a mouse in some corner, book in hand. Three months after our arrival in St. Petersburg I was sent to a boarding school. I felt so sad among strangers. All were so unfriendly, the teachers for ever shouting, the girls

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

poking fun at me, and I feeling so uncouth. It was all very strict and exacting! There were regular hours for everything, there were our common meals, and our dull teachers, and at first I felt tormented, wretched. I could not even sleep, but lay weeping all the night; those endless, cold, miserable nights! As we sat doing our lessons in the evening and I pored over my verbs and sentences, afraid even to stir, my thoughts would wander home, to father and mother, to my old nanny, to the fairy-tales she used to tell and—the misery was more than I could bear. It was a pleasure to think of even the littlest things at home and to wish and wish that I were there, that I could be sitting in that small room of ours having tea with Papa and Mama, the samovar steaming on the table, and everything so cosy, familiar and warm. Wouldn't I hug my mother, hug and squeeze her! As I sat there thinking I would weep stealthily until the lessons were quite forgotten, and all night I would have bad dreams about the teacher, the head mistress and the girls, I would be conning my lessons in my sleep, but in the morning was never the wiser. In punishment they would make me stand on my knees and give me only one course at dinner. I was always sad. At first all the girls laughed at me, teased me, deliberately put me out when I was answering the teacher's questions, pinched me as we walked in pairs to dinner or tea and carried tales to the head mistress about me for nothing at all. But how wonderful it was when my nanny came for me on Saturday evenings. I'd hug her, beside myself with joy. She would wrap me up well and off we would go—but she could hardly keep the pace as we walked home. And I would be chattering away about one thing or another until home at last, gay and light-hearted, I would hug and kiss everyone as though I had been away for ten years. And what a happy bustle there would be! I would run about greeting everyone, laughing, chattering and scampering about. Then there would be earnest talk with Papa about my lessons and the teachers and the French language and Lomonde's Grammar and everybody would be happy and pleased. Even now I smile at the memory. For my father's sake I did my best to learn my lessons well—I saw that he was spending his last kopek on me,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

that he was making shift, God knows how. Every day he grew sadder, more discontent and irritable. His affairs went from bad to worse and he was hopelessly in debt. He was so short-tempered that Mama did not dare speak or cry in his presence for fear of annoying him. She looked so unwell, grew thinner and thinner, and started coughing badly. Returning from school I would find everybody sad, father angry and mother weeping quietly. There would be reproaches and rebukes. Father would complain that I gave him no joy, no consolation, that he had spent his last coin on my education and I had not even learned to speak French. In short, mother and I were blamed for all his failures and misfortunes. And how could he torment my mother so? The very sight of her wrung my heart. Her face was drawn, her eyes sunken and there was an unnatural, consumptive flush on her pale cheeks. But the worst fell to my lot. It always began with some trifle and then went to heaven knows what lengths. Often I lost track of what it was all about. All sorts of things were held against me: my poor French, that I was a dunce, that the head mistress was a stupid woman who neglected her duties and cared nothing for our morals, that he, my father, had not yet found a situation, that Lomonde's Grammar was a poor book, much worse than Zapolsky's, that a lot of money had been wasted on me, that I was callous and unfeeling. In short, no matter how hard I struggled with my verbs and sentences, I was to blame for everything. And it was not that my father did not love me; on the contrary: he doted on mother and me. It was simply his character.

Harassed by his worries and failures, he became moody and suspicious. Often on the verge of despair, he began to neglect his health, caught a chill and after a short illness died so suddenly that for a few days we were stunned and could hardly believe he was gone. Mother fell into a stupor which made me fear for her reason. No sooner had Papa died than his creditors sprang up on all sides and descended on us in a body. Whatever we had, we had to give up. The little house that father had bought in the Petersburg Side of town some six months after our arrival had to be sold as well. How the affairs were finally settled I

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

do not know, but we remained homeless, penniless, with no one to turn to. Mama was wasting away from a painful disease; we could not support ourselves, we had nothing to live on; there was no salvation. I was only fourteen at the time, and it was then that Anna Fyodorovna first came to see us. She kept insisting that she was some sort of landowner and related to us. Mama too said she was related to us, but very distantly. She had never visited us when Papa was alive. Now she came to us with tears in her eyes, condoled over our loss and our pitiful circumstances, but added that father had himself to blame: he had lived beyond his means, had wanted to climb too high and had been too self-confident.

She said she wanted to be friends with us, suggested that bygones be bygones, and wept when Mama assured her that she had never felt any animosity. Then she took Mama to church and ordered Mass for the soul of the dear departed (as she called my father); and so we were reconciled.

After lengthy preliminaries in which she stressed our wretched circumstances, our utter loneliness, helplessness and hopelessness, she invited us to take shelter with her, as she put it. Mother thanked her, yet for a long time could not make up her mind. But as there was no way out and nothing else that we could do, she finally told Anna Fyodorovna that we gratefully accepted her offer. How well I remember the morning when we moved from the Petersburg Side to Vasilevsky Island. It was a clear, crisp autumn morning. Mama was weeping and I too felt awfully sad. My heart was heavy with vague forebodings. Those were hard times. . . . . .

. . . . . .

II

At first, before we grew accustomed to life with Anna Fyodorovna, it seemed strange and somehow frightening to us. Anna Fyodorovna's house in Sixth Line was her own property. There were five rooms, three of which were occupied by Anna Fyodorovna and my cousin Sasha, an orphan

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

whom she had adopted. The fourth was given to mother and me, and the fifth had been rented by a poor student, a certain Pokrovsky. Anna Fyodorovna was wealthier than could at first be suspected, but the source of her income was as mysterious as her occupation. Never at rest, always busy and preoccupied, she would leave the house several times a day. But just what she was busy with was more than I could guess. Her numerous and varied acquaitances kept coming and going. Who they were, God knows—they always came on business and stayed only a minute or so. Mama always called me into the room whenever the doorbell rang and this always made Anna Fyodorovna very angry. She would fume at Mama and say that we were too proud, prouder than we could afford—what business had we to be so proud; and she would carry on in this manner for hours on end. I could not understand the significance of her reproaches then; it is only now that I have realised why Mama was so reluctant to move to Anna Fyodorovna's. She was a spiteful woman and tormented us constantly. Why she ever invited us to stay, is still a mystery to me. She was rather kind at first, and it was some time before she showed her true nature, when she saw that we were utterly helpless and really had nowhere to go. Later she grew kind to me again, even to the point of familiarity and flattery. But at first I had to suffer no less than my mother. Again and again she reminded us of her benevolence, reproaching us every minute of the day. She introduced us to strangers as poor bereaved relatives whom she had sheltered out of Christian charity. During meals she would jealously watch every mouthful we took, but if we ate too little she made a scene again: we were too finicky, her table was not good enough for us—and had we ever known anything better? She never stopped scolding father, saying that he had tried to put himself above others and came to a bad end: he had reduced his family to beggary and if not for a charitable relative, a kind Christian soul, they might have been starving in the streets. What did she not say! Listening to her was more revolting than painful. Mama cried all the time, her health deteriorated from day to day; she was wasting away, but still we continued to work hard from morning till night,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

mostly sewing to order. This too displeased Anna Fyodorovna who kept saying that her house was no fashion shop. But we had to work to buy our clothes and meet unforeseen expenses. It was essential to have some money of our own. Besides, we were trying to save in the hope of moving elsewhere. But the work consumed what remained of my mother's health; she grew weaker from day to day. Illness was sapping her very life. I felt it all and saw it all as the weeks slipped by, one much like the other. We lived very quietly, we might have been in the province and not the capital. Anna Fyodorovna gradually quieted down as she realised the power she had gained over us. No one dreamed of contradicting her anyway. We were separated from her rooms by the corridor, while the room next to us belonged to Pokrovsky, as I have said. In return for tutoring Sasha in French and German, in history and geography—in all the sciences, as Anna Fyodorovna put it, he received free board and lodgings. Sasha, then thirteen years old, was a quick-witted girl, though something of a tomboy. And once, when Anna Fyodorovna observed that it could do me no harm to take lessons too, as my education had been neglected at school, my mother joyfully assented. I joined Sasha and for a year Pokrovsky taught us both.

Our tutor was a poor, a very poor young man. His health had prevented him from attending any regular courses and he was called a student simply out of habit. He lived so quietly that we never heard a sound from his room. And strange-looking he was too: he moved about so awkwardly, bowed so clumsily and spoke in such a queer manner that at first I could hardly keep from laughing. Sasha was always playing tricks on him, especially during lessons. He was short-tempered: any trifle could set him off. He would shout, and rush from the room before the lesson was over, and complain to Anna Fyodorovna. Then he would sit alone for days, poring over his books. There were very many of them, all rare and expensive. He earned some money from time to time, for he gave lessons in other places too, and as soon as he received his fees, he would buy more books. With time I got to know him better. He was the best, the kindest man I had ever met. Mama

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

thought highly of him, and, later, he came to be my best friend after her.

But at first I too played pranks upon him with Sasha, big girl though I was. For hours we would rack our brains how best to tease him and make him lose his temper. He was so absurd when angry and we were so amused (I am ashamed to think of it now). Once, when we actually drove him to tears, I heard him muttering: "What cruel children!" and all of a sudden a change came over me—I felt ashamed of myself and sorry for him. Blushing furiously and almost in tears myself, I begged him not to mind us and to take no offence at our stupid pranks. But he closed the book and left the room without finishing the lesson. All day I was tortured by remorse and could not bear the thought that we children had driven him to tears. Hadn't we expected him to weep? Hadn't we wanted him to weep? And so we, two children, had reminded him, a poor, unhappy man, of his bitter lot. I could not sleep that night, so annoyed was I with myself, so grieved and remorseful. It is said that remorse relieves the heart. How untrue! And somehow my grief was mingled with vanity. I didn't want him to regard me as a child; I was fifteen by then.

From that day my imagination was tormented by a thousand schemes to make Pokrovsky change his opinion of me. But I was shy, very timid and could settle my mind on nothing but vague dreams (and what dreams they were!). All I could do was to discontinue joining Sasha in her pranks; and he ceased being angry with us. But this was too little for my vanity.

Now, I must say a few words about the most curious, strange and pitiful man I have ever known. I speak of him at this point because hitherto I had paid no attention to him and began to do so only when everything connected with him had suddenly become of absorbing interest!

From time to time a little old man came to the house, shabbily dressed, grey-haired, awkward and, in short, very strange. He seemed always ashamed of something—ashamed of himself. Because of this he was always fidgeting, squirming and cutting such capers that one wondered if he was in his right mind. On arriving, he would stand outside the glass door afraid to come in. When someone

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

happened to pass—myself or Sasha or one of the kinder servants—he would make various signs beckoning to us. Assured by an answering gesture that there were no visitors in the house and that he was welcome to enter, he would open the door gingerly and, rubbing his hands gleefully, tiptoe to Pokrovsky's room. This man was Pokrovsky's father.

I learned his full story later. Once employed somewhere as a clerk, he had shown no ability and had held the most insignificant post. When his first wife, the mother of Pokrovsky, died, he decided to marry again. With his new wife everything went wrong. She was a proper shrew, and kept everyone under her thumb. Young Pokrovsky was a boy of ten at that time. His stepmother came to hate him, but then fortune smiled down on him. A landowner called Bykov who had known the elder Pokrovsky and had been his benefactor now extended his protection to the boy and sent him to school. He did this for the boy because he had known his deceased mother, a young woman befriended by Anna Fyodorovna and married off to Pokrovsky. Moved by generosity, Mr. Bykov, Anna Fyodorovna's close friend, had given the girl 5,000 rubles as a dowry. What became of that money is unknown. So much I learned from Anna Fyodorovna. Young Pokrovsky did not care to talk of his family affairs himself. His mother was said to have been very beautiful and I think it is strange that she should have made so poor a match. She died young, only four years after her marriage.

On finishing school, young Pokrovsky entered the university, and Mr. Bykov, who came to St. Petersburg often, continued to take a kindly interest in him. When the young man was obliged to discontinue his studies because of ill health, Mr. Bykov recommended him to Anna Fyodorovna who gave him board and lodging for tutoring Sasha.

Meanwhile, the elder Pokrovsky was so harried by his second wife that he took to the worst of vices and was almost perpetually drunk. His wife beat him, made him stay in the kitchen and reduced him to such a state that he was inured to ill usage and blows and ceased to complain. Though he was not yet really old, his addiction

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

threatened to destroy his reason. The last trace of human decency in him was his devotion to young Pokrovsky who was the image of his mother. Perhaps it was the memory of his gentle first wife that engendered this frantic affection in this broken old man? He could think and speak of nothing but his son. He visited him twice a week because he dared not come more often—even so, young Pokrovsky detested these visits. Of all his faults, his greatest was lack of respect for his father. But then, the old man was the most unpleasant creature in the world at times. He was terribly inquisitive, and his chatter and questions, of the most trivial and senseless kind, interfered with the young man's studies. And, finally, he was not always sober. The son tried to cure the father of his vice, his inquisitiveness and chatter, with the result that the old man came to regard him as an oracle and would not dare so much as to open his mouth without special permission.

The poor old man could not see or hear enough of his Petenka (as he called him). He nearly always wore a downcast, timid expression when he came to see him—never knowing how he would be received. He would stand there hesitating and if I happened to appear would question me for a full twenty minutes about his Petenka. How was his health? What kind of mood was he in? Was he busy with something important? And if so, what? Was he writing or just meditating? When I had sufficiently encouraged and reassured the old man, he would make up his mind and open the door—but, ah, how gingerly—and poke his head in. Satisfied that his son was not angry, that he had even nodded, he would slip noiselessly in and remove his coat and hat—a crumpled thing, full of holes and with a broken rim. He would hang his things, and with equal caution let himself down into a chair, never taking his eyes from his son, as if trying to divine his Petenka's mood. If Petenka were at all out of sorts he would notice it at once, get up murmuring that he had just dropped in for a moment, and that, happening to be passing, he had come only to rest a little while. Then, reaching humbly for his coat and that rag of a hat, he would again gingerly open the door and tiptoe away with a smile meant to conceal his disappointment.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

When he was well received, on the other hand, the old man was beside himself with joy. Satisfaction would then shine in every line of his face, in every gesture. If Petenka condescended to speak to him, he would rise in his seat and answer in a subdued, obedient manner, almost with awe, in the most refined, that is, the most ridiculous words. He was no speaker, poor man, and he was always confused and blushing, scarcely knowing what to do with his hands, what to do with himself, and always muttering something as if anxious to correct his answers. But if he chanced upon the right answer he would square his shoulders, straighten his waistcoat, tie and coat, and put on an air of great dignity; he would sometimes even make so bold as to rise and stroll over to the bookcase, to reach for a book at random and look at the title. He did this with feigned indifference, as though accustomed to handling the books of his son, as though a kindness from Petenka was a matter of course. But once, I happened to be present and saw how frightened he was when his son ordered him to let the books be. Abashed and confused, he stuffed the book back upside down and then, anxious to correct his mistake, wedged it into place with the wrong end; and all the while smiling and blushing and not knowing how to make up for his crime.

Anxious to change his father's ways, Pokrovsky would give him twenty-five, fifty or more kopeks, if the old man called upon him three times consecutively in a sober state. Or he would present him with a new pair of boots, a tie or waistcoat which made the old man stalk about as proud as a peacock. Sometimes he brought gingerbread and apples for Sasha and me and we talked about Petenka. He would urge us to be attentive at our lessons and obey Petenka who was a good son, an exemplary son, and, what is more, a learned son. Saying this he would wink at us so comically and make such faces that we shrieked with laughter. Mama too was very fond of him. But the old man hated Anna Fyodorovna, though he was as quiet as a mouse and humbler than dust in her presence.

My lessons with Pokrovsky were drawing to an end. He still regarded me as a child, a naughty girl like Sasha. This hurt me because I had been trying to make up for

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

my former lapses, but he would take no notice, and this annoyed me all the more. I hardly ever talked to him outside of lessons—I could barely do so even when I had the opportunity. I would blush and grow tongue-tied, and then weep with anger in some corner. Who knows how it would have ended if not for a curious incident. When mother was in Anna Fyodorovna's room one evening, I stole into his room; I knew that he was away. What made me do it I cannot say. I had never been to his room before, though we had been neighbours for more than a year. My heart was thumping madly. First I looked around with alarm and curiosity. It was a poorly furnished room and badly kept. Five rows of books ran along the wall. The chairs and table were piled with papers. Books and papers everywhere! And a queer thought came to me then, disturbing and annoying. Why should he care for my friendship and affection? He was a learned man and I so stupid —I knew nothing and had read nothing, not a single book. I stood looking enviously at the shelves groaning under the weight of all those books. I felt vexed, resentful, and strangely frenzied. I decided to read them all and at once, from the first to the last and as quickly as possible. Probably, my idea was that, having learned what he knew, I should be more worthy of his friendship. Hurriedly I snatched a dusty old volume at random, clasped it to my breast and rushed away, trembling with fear and excitement, blushing and paling by turn. I had meant to read it by the night lamp, when my mother would be asleep. But how disappointed I was when I opened it in my room and found that it was only an old battered and worm-eaten treatise in Latin. Losing no time, I returned and was just about to put it back on the shelf when I heard footsteps in the corridor. I fumbled desperately with the wretched thing; it had been so firmly wedged in place, that now, when it had been removed, its neighbours had closed the space. I could not jam it back! I was pushing as hard as I could and the rusty nail on which the shelves were hung must have been waiting just for this. Down came the shelves, books and all. The door opened and Pokrovsky entered the room.

He could not bear to have anyone tamper with his books.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

God help him who would dare even to touch them! Imagine my horror when all the books, thick and thin and of all sizes and shapes, came tumbling down and went skipping under the table and chairs and all over the room. I wanted to run, but it was too late. This is the end, I thought. The end! I was lost! Caught at a prank of a ten-year-old! Like a silly girl! An awful fool! Pokrovsky was wild with anger. "What next?" he shouted. "Aren't you ashamed of such tomfoolery? When will you grow up?" He knelt to pick up the books. I stooped to help. "Don't bother!" he rasped. "You'd have done better to keep away, when uninvited!" But he had noticed my humble gesture and softened his tone to that of the chiding tutor, the tone of our recent lessons. "When will you come to your senses at last? Look at yourself: you are not a child, not a little girl. You are fifteen." And as though to convince himself, he looked up at me and suddenly reddened. I could not understand—and stood staring. He got up, looking embarrassed, and began to speak incoherently—apologising for something, perhaps for noticing only now that I was a grownup. And at last I understood. Just what I did then, I hardly know, except that I blushed even more hotly than he and, completely flustered, covered my face and rushed from the room.

I did not know what to do with myself for shame. To think that he had found me in his room! For three days I did not dare to look at him and blushed till I almost cried. The queerest and most confused ideas came to my mind. The strangest of them was to go to him and make a clean breast of it—to explain it all and convince him that I was not just a silly girl, but had meant well. I had almost made up my mind to do so, but lacked the courage, thank God! I can well imagine how silly I should have looked. Even now I am ashamed to think of it.

My mother fell seriously ill a few days later. She took to her bed and by the third night was in a high fever and delirious. I never left her for a minute, giving her drink and medicine. By the second night I was completely exhausted and hardly awake. Green spots danced before my eyes and everything seemed to swim round me. I could have dropped off to sleep at any moment, but for the weak

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

moans of Mama. Again and again I would start up, but then sleep would steal on as before. It was torture! I don't know, I cannot remember, but in a moment when sleep was contending with wakefulness, a strange dream, a terrible vision invaded my overwrought mind. I woke with a start. The room was dark; the candle had burnt down, and streaks of light now flickered across the wall, now vanished completely. Fear, a strange horror crept over me—my imagination was caught in an evil dream, and my heart contracted. I sprang from the chair with a cry of grief, of unbearable pain. The door opened and Pokrovsky came in. I remember that I was in his arms when I recovered. Gently he placed me in a chair, offered me a glass of water and asked question after question. I said something—I don't remember what.

"You are ill," he said as he took my hand. "Very ill! You are feverish, you are endangering your health. Take a rest. Lie down and go to sleep. I'll call you in two hours. Do lie down please!" He kept urging without giving me time to protest. I was ready to collapse from weariness; my eyes were so heavy. I nestled into the chair intending to rest for half an hour, but slept until morning when Pokrovsky woke me because it was time for my mother's medicine.

At eleven o'clock on the following night, as I sat at the bedside determined not to fall asleep, Pokrovsky knocked. "It must be lonely sitting here by yourself," he said as I opened the door. "I've brought you a book. It will help to pass the time." Gratefully I took it. I can't remember what book it was, or whether I opened it at all, though I did not sleep a wink that night. A strange elation kept me awake. I was restless, unable to sit still, and again and again got up to pace the room. A pleasant warmth glowed within me, a sense of satisfaction! I was so pleased with his attention, so proud of his concern for me. All night I sat dreaming and thinking. He did not come again and I knew that he would not. And so I wondered if he would come the night after.

On the following evening, when everyone had gone to bed, Pokrovsky opened his door and stood on the threshold talking to me. I cannot remember a word of what we said

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

to one another, only that I kept blushing confused and annoyed with myself, that I wished it was over, though I had craved it, dreamed of it, and rehearsed my questions and answers all day. On that evening our friendship began. We spent several hours together every night throughout my mother's illness. Gradually I overcame my shyness, though every conversation still left me annoyed with myself. But I was secretly pleased and proud to see that he was forgetting his nasty books to be with me. Once, the talk turned jestingly upon the upsetting of the shelf. I was in a queer mood and *too* confiding and sincere at the moment. I was carried away by a strange exultation and confessed that I had wanted to learn, to know something, that I resented being looked upon as a mere child. I really must have been in a strange mood; I was full of tenderness and there were tears in my eyes. I told him everything—of my friendship for him, of wishing to care for him, to be at one with him, to comfort and soothe him. He looked at me oddly, surprised and embarrassed, and said nothing. All at once I felt hurt and disappointed. He hadn't understood and might even be laughing at me. I burst into tears like a child, unable to restrain a fit of sobbing. He took my hands, kissed and pressed them to his breast, murmuring consolations. He was moved. What he told me I cannot remember—only that I wept and laughed and wept again, my cheeks were hot and I could not utter a word for joy. Though agitated, I noticed that he was constrained and uneasy. Perhaps he could not recover from his surprise over my elation, my sudden ardour. Perhaps he was only curious at first, but afterwards he accepted my devotion, my warm words and concern with a sincerity equal to mine, with the same attention and kindness, as a friend, almost like a brother. It was so pleasant, so comforting! There was no need to conceal anything; he could feel this well and drew closer to me day by day.

We talked about everything under the sun during those sweet and anxious nights by the flickering candle, at my mother's bedside. We spoke of all that came to our minds and escaped our hearts and we were almost happy. Those were joyous hours, though sad, and it is both pleasant and painful to remember them. Memories, whether pleasant or

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

sad, are always painful, or so they are at least to me. But it is a pleasant kind of pain; and when my heart is heavy the memories are as exhilarating and refreshing as the dew of evening must be to a poor flower faint from the heat of noon.

Mother was getting better, but I still sat up at her bedside. Often, Pokrovsky would bring me books. Reading them merely to keep awake, at first, I gradually began to read them with more attention and finally with eagerness, and so much that was new, unsuspected was revealed to me, flooding my heart with fresh impressions. And the harder they were to grasp, the dearer they were to me, the sweeter to the soul. Crowding into my heart without end, they gave me no respite. Chaos disturbed my whole being. But the strange spiritual invasion could not unbalance me altogether. I was too much of a dreamer, and this saved me.

When mother grew well our evening vigils and long talks came to an end. We sometimes managed to exchange a few words, trivial perhaps, but I loved interpreting them in my own way, and reading their secret meaning. My life was full, and I was happy, serenely happy for several weeks.

One day, old Pokrovsky came to see us. Talkative as always, he was unusually cheerful, high-spirited and wordy. He laughed and joked and at last disclosed the cause of his excitement by informing us that his Petenka's birthday was only a week away, that he was going to visit his son on the occasion, that he intended to wear his new waistcoat and the boots his wife had promised to buy for him. In short, the old man was very happy and chattered away without end.

His birthday! I thought of it day and night. I, too, would give him a birthday present as a reminder of our friendship. But what should it be? At last I decided to give him some books. I knew that he wanted the complete works of Pushkin in the latest edition. And so Pushkin it would be. With my sewing I had been able to save some thirty rubles intended for a frock. I sent old Matryona, our cook, to find out the price of the complete set. And, oh dear! The eleven books, plus binding, would cost at least sixty rubles.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Where was I to get the money? I thought and thought, but could not make up my mind. I just could not ask my mother. She would have helped me, of course, but in that event everyone in the house would have known of it and the gift would be simply a token of gratitude for Pokrovsky's tuition. I wanted the present to be entirely my own. As for the trouble he had taken to teach me, I would remain his eternal debtor, to repay him with my friendship alone. At last I found the way.

I knew that the booksellers at Gostiny Dvor sometimes sold second-hand books that were almost new at half the price if only one bargained with them. So I resolved to visit Gostiny Dvor as soon as possible. My opportunity came on the next day: there was something we needed to buy and as my mother was unwell and Anna Fyodorovna had a most timely fit of laziness, the errand fell to me.

I set off with Matryona and very fortunately soon found a handsomely bound set of Pushkin. I began to bargain. The bookseller at first demanded more than the price at the shop. But then, after no little effort, it is true, pretending to go away and coming back several times, I got the dealer to come down to ten rubles in silver.* What fun it was to bargain! Poor Matryona could not understand why I was so excited or why I needed so many books. But the trouble was that I had only thirty rubles in bank-notes, and the dealer would not let the set go for a kopek less than the sum he had named. But I pleaded and pleaded and at last he relented and reduced the price by another two rubles, calling upon God to witness that he was doing this only because I was such a sweet young lady, that he would not have lowered the price for anyone else in the world. To think that only two and a half rubles were wanting! I was ready to weep with vexation; but an unforeseen circumstance helped me in my distress.

At another bookstall, not far away, I saw old Pokrovsky surrounded by four of five booksellers who were harrying him to distraction. Each was extolling his own books. What didn't they offer him, and he was eager for them all, and

* One silver ruble equalled 3 rubles 50 kopeks in bank-notes.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

more! The poor old man stood among them looking so cowed, and obviously too bewildered to make his choice. When I approached and asked what he was doing there, he was overjoyed: he loved me to distraction, perhaps as dotingly as he adored his Petenka. "I am buying books, Varvara Alexeyevna, some books for Petenka. His birthday is coming and he likes books, and so I am buying books." The old man always expressed himself comically and now he was confused as well. No matter what he chose, the price was one, two or three silver rubles. As for the larger books, he did not even ask the price, but only looked at them wistfully, fumbled with the leaves and tenderly put them back. "No, no, that's too dear," he would murmur, "perhaps those others?" And he would rummage in the periodicals, song books and almanacs of the cheaper order. "Why do you want to buy these?" I asked. "They are awful trash." "Oh, no," he replied, "there are nice books here, take a look and you'll see: some are very, very nice." The last words he uttered so plaintively that I thought he was about to cry because the better books were too expensive, and I could almost see a big tear trickling down his red nose. I asked how much money he had. "Oh that," he muttered and produced, poor man, his entire hoard wrapped in a scrap of newspaper. "Now here is a half-ruble, a twenty-kopek piece, and twenty more in copper." I drew him away, to my bookseller. "Here are eleven books which cost thirty-two rubles and fifty kopeks. I have thirty. Let me have your two rubles fifty and we'll buy the books together and make it a joint gift." He was wild with joy and tumbled all the money he had into the hands of the bookseller who at once burdened him with our purchase. The old man went home with the books stuffed into his pockets and clutched under his arms, promising faithfully to bring them to me privately on the next day.

On the following day he came to see his son, and after staying for about an hour, as usual, dropped in on us. He seated himself beside me with the most comical and mysterious expression conceivable. Smiling blandly, and gleefully rubbing his hands he told me that the books had been secretly brought to our rooms and stowed away in

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

the kitchen under Matryona's care. The conversation then turned to the happy event and the old man described in great detail just how we were to present the gift and the more he talked, the better I could see that there was something on his mind, something that he did not dare and was even afraid to mention. I said nothing, and waited. The spark of glee, the secret satisfaction hitherto evident in his antics, grimaces and the winkings of his left eye vanished, and he was growing more and more anxious and uneasy with every passing minute.

"Varvara Alexeyevna," he began at last, timidly, in a low voice, "do you know what I think, Varvara Alexeyevna?" He was now in utter confusion. "It is this way: what if you were to give him ten books, that is, for yourself, as your own gift. And I will bring the eleventh for myself, that is, as my own gift. In that way, you see, you shall have a present for him, and I shall have a present for him—both of us will have presents, each his own. . . ." He was too confused to go on and resignedly awaited my verdict. "Why do you not want us to present our gifts together, Zakhar Petrovich?" I asked. "Well, Varvara Alexeyevna, the thing is, in fact. . . ." He was stammering, entangled in his words, and very red.

"The thing is . . ." he explained at last, "I indulge a bit now and then, Varvara Alexeyevna, that is, I am always indulging, I'm afraid. In short, I don't behave as I ought—sometimes it's so cold outside, or there's some unpleasantness or other, or a sadness comes over me, or something goes wrong, and then I can't help myself, and sometimes take a drop too much. And Petenka doesn't like it, you know. He gets quite angry, scolds and lectures me—and so my gift will show him that I've been mending my ways, so to speak. He will see that I have been saving money for a long time because I never have any unless Petenka gives me some. He knows it . . . and so he'll be glad that I have spent the money in such a way, that I have saved it all for him alone."

I was sorry for the old man who sat looking at me so anxiously, and quickly made up my mind.

"Why, Zakhar Petrovich," I said, "give him all the books yourself!" "All? Do you mean all the books?" "Of

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

course!" "As my own gift?" "Yes." "As a present all my own?" "As a present all your own!" He could not seem to grasp it for a long time, although I had put it clearly enough.

"I see," he muttered dreamily, "that, of course, would be wonderful—it certainly would be splendid. But then, you.... Then what will you do, Varvara Alexeyevna?" "There will be nothing from me, that's all," I said. "Nothing!" he cried in some alarm. "Nothing from you, nothing at all?" Dismayed, he was ready to give up the idea so that I, too, should have a gift for his son. He was a kind soul. I assured him that I should have been glad to give his son something, but did not want to spoil his pleasure. "If your son is pleased," I added, "and you are pleased then I'll be pleased too because secretly, in my heart, I'll feel that I had made him this present myself." This reassured him. He stayed with us two hours more, but could not sit still for a moment, and kept jumping up, talking, laughing, romping with Sasha, kissing me furtively and pinching my arm and making faces at Anna Fyodorovna when she was not looking. Finally, Anna Fyodorovna turned him out. Never had he been so boisterous before.

When the great day arrived he appeared at the door exactly at eleven o'clock, directly from Mass, wearing a carefully mended dress-coat and, sure enough, a new waistcoat and new boots. In each hand he carried a parcel of books. We were just having our coffee in Anna Fyodorovna's drawing room (it was Sunday). His first observation was that Pushkin was a very good poet, but he became immediately confused and drifted into another topic, proclaiming that one ought to behave oneself and if one didn't, one would be indulging, and that evil proclivities were the undoing of man. He adduced several examples of fatal intemperance and stated that for some time past he had been mending his ways and conducting himself in exemplary fashion. He had always been aware of the justice of his son's words and had taken them to heart, but it was only now that he had really changed for the better. In proof of this, he begged his son to accept these books bought with the money he had been saving so long.

Listening to the old man, I could not help laughing and

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

crying in a breath. He knew how to make up a story when the occasion required. The books were transferred to his son's room and installed on the shelf. Pokrovsky, of course, had guessed the truth at once. The old man was invited to stay for dinner and what a jolly day it was. After dinner we played cards and forfeits; Sasha was full of mischief and I no less than she. Pokrovsky was attentive and tried to find a chance to be alone with me for a few words, but I just would not let him. It was the happiest day in four years.

And now come the sad and painful memories, the dark days. Perhaps, that is why my pen is moving slower, unwilling to go on. But that too, perhaps, is why I have so lovingly described all the small details of my happier days. They were so few and were followed by grief and hopeless misery which will end God knows when.

My misfortunes began with the illness and death of Pokrovsky who took to his bed two months after the events I have just described. In those last two months he worked hard to earn a living. He had no secure position. Until the very last minute, like all consumptives, he clung to the hope that he had long to live. He could have easily obtained the position of a tutor if he had not detested such an occupation. As for the civil service, it was out of the question because of his poor health. Besides, he would have had to wait for his first salary for a long time. There was nothing but failure everywhere, and his disposition was sorely tried. His health, too, was declining, though he did not notice it. Autumn came. He went out every day, wearing only a thin coat, to apply and plead for a position, which humiliated him terribly. Time and again he was caught in the rain and got his feet wet, and he finally took to his bed never to rise again. He died in mid-autumn, at the end of October.

Throughout his illness I scarcely left his room, watched over him, attended to his needs and often kept awake all night. His mind was wandering most of the time and he would talk of all sorts of things: of his books, of the positions he had sought, of me, of his father—of much that I had never known or even guessed before. In the first days of his illness everyone in the house seemed to

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

be watching me strangely, and Anna Fyodorovna would shake her head. But I calmly returned their looks and gradually they ceased to pay attention, at least my mother did.

Sometimes Pokrovsky recognised me, but these moments of lucidity were rare. He was mostly delirious. He would be arguing with someone all night in long, vague and indistinct sentences; his hoarse voice in that small room rang strange and hollow as in a vault. And I was afraid. On the last night especially he was in a frenzy, suffering greatly and moaning. His anguished moans wrung my heart. The whole household was alarmed, and Anna Fyodorovna prayed to God to take him soon. A doctor was called. He said that the end must come in the morning.

Old Pokrovsky spent the night at the door where a mat was laid for him. He kept entering the room, fearful to look upon. He was broken-hearted, stunned with grief and stupefied. His head shook with fear, he was trembling all over, he kept muttering and debating with himself. I feared for his reason. Succumbing to exhaustion just before dawn he fell into death-like sleep.

Soon after seven o'clock I saw that death was near and woke the father. The dying man was fully conscious and took leave of each of us. Strangely, I could not weep, though my heart was breaking.

But the last moments were the worst. He kept pleading for something with a faltering tongue, but I could not make out the words. It was more than I could bear. For an hour he was restless, looking at me piteously and trying to convey his meaning with gestures. Then he pleaded again in his hoarse, indistinct voice. Again I could make nothing of it. By turns, I brought everyone to his bedside, gave him some water, but he shook his head sadly. At last I understood what he wanted: he was asking me to draw back the curtain to have a last look at the daylight, at the sun and all God's world. I raised the curtain, but the early day outside was a sad and mournful as the waning of his poor life. There was no sunshine. Clouds stretched across the sky in a misty veil. It was such a sad, rainy, overcast sky. A fine rain patter-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

ed on the window-panes, streaking them with rivulets of cold, dirty water; it was bleak and dark. The pale light of day stole into the room and weakly challenged the trembling flame of the icon lamp. The dying man looked at me wistfully and shook his head. The next moment he was gone.

The funeral was arranged by Anna Fyodorovna. A very plain coffin was bought and an ordinary cart hired. To recompense the outlay, Anna Fyodorovna seized the dead man's books and other belongings. The old man quarrelled bitterly with her, recovered as many of the books as he could, stuffed them into his pockets, into his hat and would not part with them all the three days until the funeral, carrying them even to church. He was so dazed, he seemed to be bereft of reason; he kept fussing around the coffin, now straightening the *venchik*,* now lighting or snuffing the candles. His thoughts could not long remain fixed on any one thing. Neither Mama nor Anna Fyodorovna attended the service in church. Mama was unwell and Anna Fyodorovna was about to go, but again quarrelled with old Pokrovsky and changed her mind. The old man and I alone were present. During the service a sort of panic came over me, a sort of premonition of the future; I could hardly endure it till the service was over. At last the coffin was closed, nailed down, placed upon the cart and carried off. I followed till the end of the street. The driver had set the horse at a trot and the old man was running behind, weeping loudly, his sobs breaking off when his breath caught. He had lost his hat, but did not pause to pick it up. His hair was wet with the rain and the sharp wind lashed his face. He seemed to notice nothing and kept darting from one side of the cart to the other, the tails of his old coat flapping. Books protruded from all his pockets; he clutched the largest to his breast. The passers-by took off their hats and crossed themselves. Some stopped to stare at the poor old man. The books kept falling from his

---

* *Venchik*—a satin or paper ribbon with the images of Jesus Christ, the Holy Virgin and the Apostle John, placed on the forehead of the deceased in accordance with the custom of the Greek Orthodox Church.—*Ed.*

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

pockets into the mud. When someone stopped him and told him he had dropped a book, he would pick it up and dash after the cart again. At the corner of the street a ragged old beggar woman tagged after him. When the cart disappeared, I went home, fell upon my mother's breast, sobbing violently. I kissed her and flung my arms about her as though to keep my last remaining friend safe from the clutches of death. But death hovered over her already. . . . . .

. . . . . .

June 11

How grateful I am for yesterday's walk to the Islands, Makar Alexeyevich. How lovely they are, how fresh and green! I had not seen trees and grass for such a long time. When I was ill I thought I was going to die, and so imagine how I felt yesterday! Please don't be annoyed because I seemed so sad yesterday. I was really happy and light of heart, but somehow in my happiest moments I am always sad. And if I did cry, it doesn't matter, I often weep and don't know why. I feel everything so poignantly; my impressions are always so painful. The pale, cloudless sky, the setting sun and the stillness of the evening—well, I don't know—I was in a state to be easily moved and my heart was heavy and asked for tears. Why am I writing all this? It is all vague even in my heart and on paper it seems meaningless, but perhaps you will understand. Tears and laughter! How good, how kind you are, Makar Alexeyevich. How you looked at me yesterday to read what I was feeling in my eyes, and delighting in my enthusiasm. Whether it was a bush, a sapling, an alley of trees, or a strip of water that I saw, there you were watching me and strutting before me as proud as though it were all your own estate. All this shows that you have a kind heart, Makar Alexeyevich, and I love you for it. Goodbye, my dear. I am unwell again today. I got my feet wet and caught cold. Fedora, too, is unwell and so both of us are invalids. Don't forget us and come as often as you can.

Yours,

V. D.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

June 12

My dear Varvara Alexeyevna,

Do you know, I thought you would describe your impressions of yesterday in verse, and instead you have put it all in one plain page. But I mean to say that though you have written very little, it is very good and very dear. There is nature and all sorts of landscapes and feelings, in short, you have described it all very well. As for me, I have no talent. Nothing will come of it even if I write a dozen pages. I have tried it and I know. You say, my darling, that I am a kind man, incapable of wronging my neighbour, and responsive to the merciful goodness of God as manifest in nature, and you praise me in many other ways as well. It is all true, my dear, the Gospel truth, I am just as you described, I know it myself. Yet my heart cannot help melting when I read the things you write, but then I begin to brood. Now I shall tell you something of myself.

When I first came to the office I was seventeen. It was thirty years ago, if a day. And I dare say it is many a service coat I have worn out in that time. I grew older and wiser in the service, and I have seen something of people too. I have lived, you may be sure! Why, there was a time when I was nearly recommended for decoration. You may not believe it but as God is my witness. And what do you think happened, my dear? It was all ruined for me by spiteful people. I am an ignoramus and simply stupid, perhaps, but I have a heart just as anybody else. And so, Varenka, do you know what those spiteful people did to me? I am ashamed to say—you had better ask why they did it. Only because I am timid, because I am humble, because I am soft-hearted. I was not to their taste, that's why. It began with little things: "Makar Alexeyevich is this, and Makar Alexeyevich is that." Then it came to: "Now what can you expect of Makar Alexeyevich?" And finally: "Who is to blame? Makar Alexeyevich of course!" And so you see, my darling, it was always Makar Alexeyevich's fault. That is what they did: make Makar Alexeyevich a byword in the whole ministry. But this was not enough for them. Soon there were remarks about the boots

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

I wore, about my service coat, my hair and even my figure: it was all wrong and had to be changed. And this has gone on for years, every blessed day, as long as I can remember. I'm used to it by now, I can get used to anything because I'm only a little man, of no account. Yet, why should I put up with it all? What wrong have I done? Have I snatched another man's promotion out of turn? Have I ever slandered anyone to our superiors? Have I ever wrangled for a rise? Have I ever intrigued against anyone? It would be sinful even imagining such a thing! What need had I for all that? And just consider, my dear, am I sufficiently clever to be ambitious and deceitful? What have I done to deserve all this? You find me a worthy man, and you, my darling, are an incomparably better person than all of them. And, after all, what is the greatest civic virtue? Yevstafy Ivanovich in a private talk yesterday said that the greatest civic virtue was to make money. Yevstafy Ivanovich was joking, of course (I'm sure Yevstafy Ivanovich was joking), but the moral is that one should not be a burden to anyone, and I am a burden to nobody. I have my crust of bread, stale perhaps, but honestly earned and very lawfully consumed. What is a man to do? There is no great feat in the copying of papers, but I'm proud of it still, for I work by the sweat of my brow. And then, what is wrong with copying papers? Is it a sin? "He sits there copying!" "The office rat is copying!" What of it? What's dishonest about that? My writing is very neat and nice to look at and His Excellency is always pleased—it is I who copy the most important papers for His Excellency. As for style, bother it, I have none: I know it very well; and that's why I have never risen in the service. Even to you, my Varenka, I write as I am writing now, without flourishes, just as the thoughts come to me. I know it very well, but let me ask: what would happen if everybody began composing? Who would do the copying then? I am asking you this question, and I want an answer. Well then, I know that I am necessary and let them stop tripping me up with their jibes. Let them even call me an "office rat" if I look like one, but can't they see that this rat is necessary, that this rat is useful, that it is a rat that is appreciated, a rat remunerated? That's the sort of a rat

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

I am! But enough of rats, my dear: I hadn't meant to write about this, I simply lost my temper a bit. From time to time it is pleasant to give the devil his due. Good-bye, my darling, my kind comforter, my little dove. I'm sure to come to see you soon, my angel. Until then don't be lonely. I shall bring a book too. Good-bye, Varenka.

Your sincerest well-wisher,

Makar Devushkin

June 20

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

I am writing this in a hurry to get my work finished on time. Let me explain: there is the chance of a very good bargain. Fedora says that someone wants to sell a new uniform complete with trousers, waistcoat and cap—quite new and cheap too. Couldn't you buy it? You are better off now, you have some money, as you yourself admit. Now, please don't be a miser, you need all those things. Just look at yourself, look at the clothes you are wearing. They're so shabby, it's a shame. And you have nothing new whatever, I'm sure of it, though you say you have. God knows what you've done with your new uniform. And so please listen to me and buy it. Do it for my sake, to show that you love me.

You have sent me a gift of some linen, but you are just ruining yourself. It is a frightening sum you spent on me—a terrible lot of money! What a spendthrift you are! These things are really unnecessary. I know, I am perfectly sure that you love me, there is no need to remind me of it by your gifts, especially when it is so hard for me to accept them. I know what they cost you. Once and for all, don't ever do it again, I beg of you. You won't, will you?

You have asked me, Makar Alexeyevich, to send you the rest of my notes and you want me to finish them. To tell the truth, I don't know how I could have written even as much as this. I can't bear to speak of the past or think of it even, the very memory frightens me. And it is hardest

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

of all to speak of my poor mother who left her daughter in the clutches of monsters. The thought of it still makes my heart bleed. It is all so fresh that I have not been able to come to myself, let alone to regain my peace though a year has passed. But you know all about it.

I have told you what Anna Fyodorovna thinks now. She is accusing me of ingratitude and flatly denies that she had anything to do with Mr. Bykov's actions. She wants me to return and says that I am living on alms and will come to a bad end. She says that if I return she will induce Mr. Bykov to make amends and give me a dowry. I don't want anything from them. I am happy here with you and my kind Fedora who reminds me of my nanny. You are a distant relative, but your name is a protection. As for them, I do not want to know them and will forget them if I can. What more can they want of me! Fedora says that it is all gossip and that they will leave me alone. God grant that they will.

V. D.

June 21

My dear, my little dove,

I don't know how to begin. How strange it is, dear heart, that we live here, this way. What I want to say is that I have never known such blissful days. It is just as though the dear God had blessed me with a home and family. Oh, you sweet, darling child! Why waste your dear breath on those poor four chemises that I sent. You needed them, Fedora told me. It has been such happiness to give you pleasure; it is my own pleasure, so don't cross me, don't argue. Nothing like this has ever happened to me before, my love. I'm going into society, too. My life is doubly full because you live across the street to brighten my days. And then, I've been invited to tea today by my neighbour Ratazyaev, the official who gives those literary parties. We are going to read literature. That's the sort we are. There! Good-bye, my dear. I have just jotted this

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

down with no special purpose except to let you know that I am well. Through Theresa you have let me know, my darling, that you need some coloured silk for embroidery. I shall buy it, my darling, I certainly shall. No later than tomorrow I shall have the delight of gratifying your wish. I even know just where it can be bought. I remain

Your sincere friend,
Makar Devushkin

June 22

My dear Varvara Alexeyevna,

I am sorry to inform you of something so pitiful, so very very pitiful that happened in our house. Gorshkov's little boy passed away soon after four o'clock this morning. I can't say of what he died: of scarlet fever or something of the sort. I went in to comfort them, of course. They do live poorly and how untidy their room was! And no wonder: they all live in one room separated only by several screens for the sake of decency. The coffin stood ready, a plain little coffin but rather pretty. They bought it ready made. The boy was nine years old, a promising child they say. It hurt to look at them, Varenka. The mother was not crying, but she looks so sad, the poor thing. It may be a relief to have a child less to feed. There are two more: a baby and a little girl of six or so. There's not much joy in watching the suffering of children, especially if they are your own and you can't help them. The father in an old shiny frock-coat sat on a broken chair. Tears were streaming down his cheeks, not from grief, perhaps, but habit, because there is something the matter with his eyes. He is a queer sort, always blushing when you talk to him, confused and tongue-tied. The little girl, his daughter, stood near the coffin, so wan, poor thing, and thoughtful. I don't like to see a child so lost in thought, Varenka; somehow, it is unpleasant. Her rag doll lay on the floor—she was not playing with it; she stood there with a finger pressed to her

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

lips, and did not stir. Our landlady gave her a sweet and she took it but didn't eat it. This is so sad, Varenka, isn't it?

Makar Devushkin

June 25

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

I am returning your book, a nasty book. It's too disgusting to touch. Wherever did you dig up such a gem? Joking apart, do you really like such books, Makar Alexeyevich? The other day you promised to send me something to read. We will share it, if you wish. And now good-bye. I have no time to write more.

V. D.

June 26

Dear Varenka,

To tell the truth I haven't read that book. I read only a few pages and saw that it was all frivolity just to make people laugh, and I thought that it would really be jolly. Who knows, I thought, Varenka will perhaps like it too, and that is why I sent it.

But Ratazyaev—he has promised to lend me something really worth while, so you will have plenty to read, my dear. That Ratazyaev is a deep one, a real scholar, he even writes himself. Heavens, how well he writes! He has a facile pen and knows how to put style into it, that is, into every word, why, even such empty, trivial and vulgar words, as I might use when speaking to Faldoni or Theresa, are full of style when he uses them. I go to his parties too. We sit there smoking and he reads his writings to us, sometimes until five o'clock in the morning. A feast of literature! It's so lovely, like flowers, there's no other word for it. You can make a bouquet out of every page! And he is so kind, too, so considerate and obliging! What

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

am I compared to him? Nothing! He has a reputation! And I? I have none. I just don't exist! And still, he is benevolent to me! He even allows me to copy some things for him! But don't think, my darling, that it is only a scheme, that he is benevolent only to make me copy things! That's nasty gossip, my dear, just nasty gossip! I'm doing it because I really want to, for my own pleasure and that exactly is why he is benevolent—to give me pleasure. I am well able to appreciate delicacy when I see it, my darling! He is a good, kind man. Yes, and a marvellous writer!

It's a good thing, literature is, Varenka, really good. That's what I learned from them the day before yesterday. A profound thing, too! It's edifying and fortifying, and all this and a good deal more is to be found about it in their book! And so well written! Literature is a picture, that is, a picture of a kind, and a mirror; it expresses passion, gives fine criticism, instruction, and is also a record of life. I got it all from them. To put it frankly, darling, I can sit there listening (smoking my pipe like the others), but as soon as they begin arguing over all sorts of matters, then I am out of it, Varenka. That's over our heads! I really feel ashamed of myself: sitting there all evening like a block of wood, racking my brains for an apt word to put in, and not finding even half an apt word! And one feels so sorry, Varenka, that one is not quite up to the mark, that years have made me no wiser. What do I do with my leisure: I sleep like a log. Whereas I might be doing something pleasant: I might be writing. It would be useful to me and edifying to others. Why, do you know how much they earn for this, may God forgive them? Take Ratazyaev, for one, the money he's paid! To write a sheet is nothing to him. He can write as many as five a day, he gets three hundred rubles a sheet, he says. And if it is an amusing story or something that people are curious about, he'll get the whole of five hundred. Let them dare refuse. We'll ask for a thousand next time! None of your nonsense with us, Varvara Alexeyevna! Why, my darling, take verses, just short verses—he has a full copybook of them—costs seven thousand, if a kopek! Just think of it! The price of an estate, of a mansion! He says they have offered five

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

thousand, but he knows better. I tried to reason with him: take the five thousand, I said, and to the devil with them! It's five thousand rubles in cash! But he is stubborn. "They'll give me seven!" Isn't he shrewd, really.

Why waste words? I'll do better to quote *The Italian Passions,* that is what his book is called and you can judge for yourself:

"Vladimir started, for in his veins the lust of passion had welled until it had reached boiling-point.

" 'Countess!' he cried. 'Do you know how terrible is this adoration of mine, how infinite this madness? No! My dreams have not deceived me—I love you ecstatically, madly! All the blood in your husband's body could never quench the furious, surging rapture in my soul! No obstacle could arrest the all-destroying, infernal flame which is consuming my weary breast! Oh, Zinaida, my Zinaida!'

" 'Vladimir!' she whispered, almost beside herself, as she sank upon his bosom.

" 'Oh, Zinaida!' cried the enraptured Smelsky once more.

"His breath was coming in sharp, broken pants. The lamp of love was burning brightly on the altar of passion, and searing the hearts of the two unfortunate sufferers.

" 'Vladimir!' again she whispered in her intoxication, while her bosom heaved, her cheeks glowed, and her eyes flashed fire.

"Thus was a new and dread union consummated.

. . . . . .

"Half an hour later the aged Count entered his wife's boudoir.

" 'Well, my love?' said he. 'Shouldn't we order tea for the welcome guest of ours?' And he patted her on the cheek."

Now what do you think of that, Varenka? A little frivolous perhaps? But good just the same. Let's give a man his due. And here is another bit from his story *Yermak and Zuleika.* Imagine, my dear, this Yermak, the wild and terrible conqueror of Siberia, is in love with Zuleika, the daughter of the Siberian tsar Kuchum. Zuleika is his captive. As you see, it is something straight from the times of Ivan the Terrible.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

" 'You love me, Zuleika? Say again that you love me, you love me!'

" 'I *do* love you, Yermak,' whispered Zuleika.

" 'Then, heaven and earth, I thank you! Heaven and earth, you have made me happy! You have given me all, all that my tortured soul has been seeking ever since I was born! 'Tis for this that you have led me hither, my guiding star—'tis for this that you have led me beyond the Stone Range! To all the world will I now show my Zuleika, and people, those frenzied monsters, will not dare to blame me. Oh, if men would but understand the secret anguish of her tender heart, and see the poem which lurks in each of her little tears! Oh, let me kiss away your tears, let me drink those heavenly drops, divine one!'

" 'Yermak,' said Zuleika, 'the world is cruel, and men are unjust. They will drive us from their midst—they will condemn us, my beloved Yermak! A poor maiden who was reared amid the snows in the tents of her father will wilt in that false and icy, heartless and haughty society of yours. They will never understand me, my heart's desire.'

" 'Then my Cossack sword will whistle over their heads!' cried Yermak, his eyes aflame."

Imagine how he must have felt, Varenka, when he learned that Zuleika had been stabbed to death. Under cover of night, the blind old Kuchum stole into Yermak's tent and stabbed his own daughter. He knew he was delivering a fatal blow to the man who had robbed him of his throne and sceptre.

" 'I love the sound of steel against stone!' cried Yermak in the passion of his wrath as he whetted his blade on the enchanted rock. 'I want their blood. They must be hacked and hacked to pieces!' "

Then Yermak, unable to bear the loss of his Zuleika, throws himself into the Irtish and the story ends.

And here is a bit in a comical vein, just to make people laugh:

"Do you know Ivan Prokofyevich Zheltopouz? He is the man who bit Prokofy Ivanovich's leg. Ivan Prokofyevich is a short-tempered person, but he possesses many rare virtues. Prokofy Ivanovich, on the contrary, is fond of radishes with honey. When Pelageya Antonovna was his

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

friend.... Do you know Pelageya Antonovna? She is the woman who always puts on her petticoat inside out."

Isn't it hilarious, Varenka, isn't it simply hilarious? We laughed fit to split when he read it aloud to us. That is the kind of man he is, God forgive him. Perhaps it is a bit fanciful and much too frivolous, but then it is all innocent and has nothing in it of free thought and radical ideas. I must say, Varenka, that Ratazyaev is a man of good character and therefore an excellent writer—which is more than can be said of most writers.

And what if—what absurd ideas one gets—what if I wrote something? Imagine that you suddenly saw a book entitled *Poems by Makar Devushkin*. What would you say then, my little angel? How would it strike you, eh? As for me, my darling, I would not dare to show myself on Nevsky Prospekt then. How would I feel if everyone were looking at me and saying: "There goes Devushkin, the poet and *littérateur*!" "Devushkin in the flesh!" What would I do with my boots then? In passing I must mention that they are always patched and that the soles sometimes gape in a most unbecoming way. How horrible if all could see that Devushkin, the poet and *littérateur*, went about in patched and broken boots. What would the *comtesse-duchesse* say if she saw me? I don't suppose she would notice it at all because a countess doesn't really care about one's boots, especially a clerk's boots. (There are boots and boots, of course.) But my own friends would give me away, and Ratazyaev would be the first. He often visits Countess B., every receiving day, he says, and he also drops in casually. She is a delightful woman, he says, literary through and through. What a clever fellow that Ratazyaev is!

But enough of this. I have been writing just for the fun of it and your amusement. Good-bye, my precious. It's a good deal of nonsense that I have scratched together here, but that's because I'm in the highest spirits today. We all had dinner with Ratazyaev and they (the rascals!) drank wine too. I oughtn't to write about it. But don't imagine anything wrong about me. It's nothing really. I'll send you the books, I'll send them for sure.... There's a book by Paul de Cocque circulating in the house. But that is

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

not a book for you, my darling, on no account! It is said that he has aroused the virtuous indignation of all the critics in St. Petersburg. I am sending you a pound of sweets—I bought it specially for you. Enjoy them, my darling, and remember me every time you take one. You must suck the fruit-drops, my dear, and never bite them, or you'll have toothache. Do you like candied fruit? Write to me if you do. Well good-bye, Varenka, good-bye! God bless you, my little dove, and I remain

Your truest friend,
Makar Devushkin

June 27

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

Fedora says that, if I wish, there are people who will help me and secure me a good post as governess. Shall I consent or not? What do you advise? If I agree I shall no longer be a burden to you: and it's a well-paid post too, I believe. On the other hand, the idea of entering a strange house somehow appals me. They are landowners somewhere. They will start making inquiries, asking me about my past and prying, and what shall I tell them? Besides, I am such a recluse, I'm so unsociable, and I grow used to the places I have lived in long and feel better even if the life is hard. And it is far away and who knows what I shall have to do, perhaps just nurse the children. And they seem hard to please too: they have had two governesses in two years. I entreat you to advise me, Makar Alexeyevich. Shall I go or not? Why don't you ever call upon us? We see so little of you these days. Only on Sundays and in church. You too are rather a recluse, just like myself. And I am almost a relative of yours. You just don't love me, Makar Alexeyevich, and I am so sad alone. Sometimes, especially towards evening, I sit all alone, all

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

alone. Fedora may be away and I sit and think and think—going over the past, the sad and the joyful both—and it all passes before my eyes, and again I see all the familiar faces (they are almost real) and Mama more often than others. And what dreams I have. I feel that my health is gone; I'm so weak. When I got up today I suddenly went faint. I have had a bad cough for some time. I will die soon, I feel it, I know it. Who will care, who will weep for me, who will follow my coffin to the graveyard? And perhaps I shall have to die in a strange house, in a strange place. O Lord, how sad life is.

Why do you feed me with sweets all the time, Makar Alexeyevich? I really can't imagine where you find the money? Save your money, my dear friend, save it, for heavens' sake. Fedora is selling a rug which I embroidered. They are offering us fifty rubles in bank-notes. It is a good price, more than I expected. I shall give three rubles to Fedora and make a frock for myself, a simple, but warm frock. Also I'll make a waistcoat for you, make it myself and out of good material.

Fedora has brought me a book, *The Tales of Ivan Belkin,** which I am sending to you; read it if you care. But please don't get it soiled or keep it too long. It is not mine. Two years ago mother and I read these stories together and it saddened me so to read them alone now. If you have any books, please send them to me—unless they come from Ratazyaev. He will probably offer you his own works if they are printed at all. How can you possibly like them, Makar Alexeyevich? They are such rubbish. Now good-bye, I have chattered too much as it is. I like to chatter sometimes when I'm sad. It is like medicine, it helps at once, especially if I pour out everything that is burdening my heart. Good-bye, my friend, good-bye.

Yours,

V. D.

* A collection of stories by A. S. Pushkin written in 1830s.—*Ed.*

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

June 28

Varvara Alexeyevna, my dove,

Come, you mustn't brood like that. Aren't you ashamed of yourself? Come, come, my angel! How could you ever have such thoughts? You're not ill at all, my love, not ill at all! You are blooming, simply blooming! A little pale perhaps, but blooming just the same. What are those dreams and visions of yours? You ought to be ashamed, my little darling. Just snap your fingers at them. How is it that I sleep well, that nothing ever troubles me? Why, look at me! I sleep like a log, am hale and hearty, as strong as a youth—I really am! Come, come, Varenka! Take yourself in hand! I know how you go on: any trifle will set you off dreaming and brooding. Don't do it any more, for my sake! As for that post of governess, never! No, no, no! The idea of such a thing! How could you think of it! And the place is far away too. No, my darling, I won't stand for it. With all my might I protest against it! I'll sell my old frock-coat first and go about in my shirt-sleeves rather than let you suffer in want. No, Varenka, it is not for you. It is folly, just foolishness! I'm sure it's all Fedora's fault; it is she, stupid woman, who put you up to it. Don't trust her, dear. There may be things about her that you do not know. She is a stupid, nagging gossip. She nagged her late husband to death. Perhaps she has made you angry? No, no, my sweet, not for anything in the world! And what will I do, what will be left to me? No, Varenka, no, dear heart! Put the thing out of your mind! What, after all, do you lack here? And what joy you give us, Fedora and me! And you are fond of us too. So why not live on, nice and cosy, the way you do! You may read or sew; or just read and not sew—only don't go away. It won't do at all, your going away! I'll get the books you need and we'll take walks again, but be sensible and think no more of such foolishness. I'll come to see you, and very soon too. Forgive me for speaking my mind, but it's bad of you, my sweet, very bad. I'm not a learned man, of course, the schooling I've had was paid for with kopeks, as the saying goes, but it's not of myself, but of Ratazyaev that I want to speak. Forgive me, darling, but I must stand

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

up for him. He is my friend and I must stand up for him. He writes well, very, very well, not bad at all in fact. I cannot agree with you in this, I simply cannot. He writes in such a flowery style, with such nice figures of speech and all sorts of ideas. Not bad at all! Perhaps you did not read it with the proper feeling, Varenka? Or you were just in a bad mood—perhaps you were angry with Fedora or something unpleasant had happened? Read it again, Varenka, with the proper feeling and more attentively; read it when you are merry and content and in a happy mood, for instance, with a fruit-drop in your mouth. I do not doubt (who does?), of course, that there are better writers than Ratazyaev, far better perhaps. They are good, yet Ratazyaev is good too; they write well, but he does not write badly either. He writes for himself, does his bit of writing—and good for him! Good-bye, darling, I can't write any more. I am busy today. Now mind, my little bird, don't be troubled any more by gloomy thoughts and may God be with you, while I remain

Your true friend,
Makar Devushkin

P.S. Thanks ever so much for the book, darling, I'll read Pushkin too. I'll call upon you later in the day, towards evening.

July 1

My dear friend, Makar Alexeyevich,

No, my friend, there's no life for me among you here. On consideration I find that it is quite wrong to refuse such an advantageous offer. I would at least be sure of my daily bread, and I would do my best to deserve the kindness of a strange family. I would even try to change my character if necessary. It is, of course, hard to live among strangers, seeking their favour, hiding one's thoughts and suppressing one's feelings, but God will help me. I cannot remain so unsociable all my life! Such things

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

have happened to me before. I have not forgotten my days at the boarding-school. I remember the Sundays when I would be romping at home; even when Mama scolded me my heart was easy and ever so light. But as evening crept on my spirits dropped and I was utterly dejected: I had to be back at school by nine o'clock, at school where everything was so strange and cold and strict, and the mistresses so ill-tempered on Mondays. And I wanted to cry. Somewhere in a corner I would weep secretly—because they might say I was lazy. But it wasn't my lessons that made me weep. And what happened afterwards? In time I grew so used to the school that there too, I cried when I had to leave and to part with my friends.

And then, it's not right that I should be a burden to you and Fedora. It's a tormenting thought. I am putting things plainly because I'm used to frankness with you. Don't I see how Fedora gets up at the grey of dawn to do her washing all day long? And old bones, as you know, crave rest. Don't I see that you are spending your all on me, your very last kopek? And this, in your circumstances, my friend. You write that you will sell the coat off your back to keep me from want. I believe you, my dear, I believe your kind heart. But that's what you say now—when you've had a windfall, that bonus! But afterwards? You know that I'm constantly ill. I cannot keep working the way you do, though I'd be very glad to. And then there is not always enough work. And what is left to me? To waste away as I look at you, poor things. How can I be of the least use to either of you? Why am I so necessary to you? What good have I done you? I'm attached to you with all my heart. You are very, very dear to me—but such is my destiny: I can love, but cannot turn my love into good deeds—to repay you for your kindness. Don't keep me any longer. Think it over and tell me your final word. Awaiting your answer, I am

Your affectionate
U. D.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

July 1

What nonsense, what fancies, Varenka! No sooner are you alone than all sorts of silliness come into your pretty head! You don't like this and you don't like that, and all of it is sheer nonsense. Just tell me what you need, just what do you lack? We love you, and you love us, we are content and happy—what more can there be? What will you find among strangers? You don't know what strangers are, my dear! You ought to have asked me what they are. I know what they are like, I know it very well. I have tasted of their bread. They are mean, Varenka, spiteful and mean, oh so mean! They'll tear your heart to pieces with reproachful words and nasty looks. And here, with us you are as warm and cosy as a little bird in a nest. And if you fly away what shall we do, poor people with nothing to live for? What shall I, an old man, do? You say that you are useless? Useless? How can you say that? You are not doing us any good? Just consider, my dear, how much you are doing for me. For one thing you have so beneficial an influence and . . . for instance, I'm thinking of you right now and it makes me so happy. . . . Sometimes I set all my feelings down in the letters I write to you and then get a detailed answer. . . . I can also buy you nice things to wear—I have even bought you a hat. . . . Or there are things you want me to do. How can you say that you are useless? And what would I do, an old man, all alone? What am I good for? Perhaps you did not think of that, Varenka. But you ought to. Just put it this way: what would the old man do without me? I'm used to having you near. And if you go, there is only one thing I can do: go to the Neva and put an end to it all. What else is there to do? Ah Varenka, my darling Varenka, it seems you would like to have me laid on a cart and carried all alone to the Volkovo graveyard where only an old beggar woman will watch them fill my grave with sand and go away, leaving me there all alone. It's a sin, dear heart, a grievous sin to want such things. I am returning your book, Varenka, and if you want to know my opinion, my little friend, I'll say this: I have never read a better book in all my life. And I keep asking myself: how could I have been such a bump-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

kin, may God forgive me! What have I been doing with myself? From what forests have I sprung? Honestly, I do not know a thing, my dove, nothing at all! Plainly, I'll say this, Varenka: I'm an ignorant man. I have read very little, very little indeed, almost nothing: *A Picture of Man,* a very wise book, also *A Boy Who Learned to Play Pretty Pieces on the Chimes,* also *Ivick's Storks* and that is all. That's all I've read. And now I have read *The Station-Master** in that book of yours. And so you see, my Varenka, that it can come to pass that you live a long time and never know that right at hand there lies a book which tells the whole story of your life as simply as a song. What you could not see before grows clear as you read on, and you remember things, and understand things, and guess things. And what else I like about the book is this: other books are sometimes so clever that I read and read and can't understand a thing for the life of me. I'm so dense by nature that the too important books are not for me. But when you read this book, it's just as if you wrote it yourself as if, in a manner of speaking, it were your own heart—whatever kind it may be—that lay there turned inside out for all to read. That's how it is. Really, it's simple enough. I could have written it myself. Why not? I feel it just as it is written in the book. Didn't I have the same experiences as that poor Samson Vyrin.** How many Vyrins, poor devils, are there among us! And didn't the author describe it all so cleverly? I almost wept, as I read how he took to drinking, how he drank himself out of his mind and lay sleeping all day on that sheepskin, or sat wiping the tears away with the dirty hem of his coat as he thought of his poor stray daughter. That is life. Read it, do. It is a living thing. I have seen it myself. It's all about me. Take our Theresa for instance, or our poor clerk. Isn't he another Samson Vyrin, though his name is Gorshkov? It's a common matter, and to each of us this very thing may happen. It may happen even to a count who lives on Nevsky or on the embankment, though it will seem different there with their high tone. But it will be

* One of *The Tales of Ivan Belkin* by A. Pushkin.
** A character from *The Station-Master.—Ed.*

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

the same, for all that. Yes, anything may happen. Even to me! You see how it is, dear heart: how can you think of leaving us? The vice of Vyrin may overwhelm me also and both of us will be undone. So for the love of God, my darling, put those willful thoughts out of your head and torture me no longer. My poor little fledgling, how can you earn your living, keep safe from harm, and defend yourself from evil people? Come, come, Varenka! Pay no heed to bad advice. You will do better to read your book again and more attentively: it will do you good.

I have told Ratazyaev about *The Station-Master*. He insists that it is old-fashioned and that nowadays all good books have pictures and various descriptions. I didn't understand him very well. He conceded that Pushkin was a good writer, that he contributed to the glory of Russia, and said much more in the same vein. Yes, Varenka, it's a good book, a very good book. You should read it again with attention. Take my advice and make an old man happy by your obedience. God will reward you, my love. He will surely reward you.

Your faithful friend,
Makar Devushkin

July 6

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

Today, Fedora brought me fifteen rubles in silver and she was so pleased when I gave her three rubles, poor thing. I am writing this in a hurry: I'm cutting the waistcoat for you—the material is lovely: it's yellow and patterned with tiny flowers. I'm sending you another book, a collection of stories. I have read some of them. Read the one entitled *The Service Coat*.* You are pressing me to accept your invitation to the theatre. Isn't it too expensive? If we go at all, then buy the tickets for the gallery. I haven't been to the theatre for longer than I can remem-

* A story by N. V. Gogol, written in 1842.—*Ed.*

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

ber. But again, I'm afraid: isn't it too dear? Fedora keeps shaking her head and saying that you are living beyond your means. I can see that for myself—how much you have spent on me alone! I'm afraid something may happen if you go on like this. Fedora has been telling me of some rumours concerning your arguments with the landlady about the rent. I fear for you, Makar Alexeyevich! Good-bye, I'm in a hurry just now. There is a small matter to which I must attend: I must change the ribbon on my hat.

V. D.

P.S. If we go to the theatre I think I shall wear my new hat and black mantilla. That will be nice, won't it?

July 7

My dearest Varvara Alexeyevna,

To continue our talk of yesterday, let me tell you, my darling, that once upon a time I too was a featherbrained young man, thoroughly smitten with an actress, but the funniest part was that I had practically never seen her except that once in the theatre. And yet I was in love, head over ears. My neighbours at the time were five boisterous young men with whom I grew friendly almost against my will; I kept my distance, at first. Not to be a killjoy, however, I generally humoured them. The things they told me about that actress! Every evening, whenever there was a show, the whole crowd would take seats in the gallery—they never had a kopek for bare essentials—and there they would be, clapping and calling her again and again and applauding like mad! And afterwards there could be no question of sleep; they would be talking of their dear Glasha all night: they were all in love with her, all to a man. That canary sang in every heart. They finally roused me too, a helpless youth, and before I knew it I found myself in the gallery with the others. Only a bit of the curtain was visible from where I sat, but nothing missed my ears. True enough, the canary had a very sweet voice, a ringing, honeyed, nightingale warble. We shouted ourselves hoarse, clapped our hands sore, until one of us

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

was actually turned out. I came home all in a daze with only one ruble in my pocket and the next salary ten days off. And what do you think, my darling? On the very next day before office hours I spent the remainder of my money on some perfume and scented soap at the French barber's. Why I bought it is more than I can say. I went without dinner that day, but used the time to moon under her window. She lived on the third floor, in Nevsky Prospekt. I would rest at home for an hour after work, and then back to the Nevsky to walk beneath her window. I kept doing this for a month and a half. I would hire a cab at the corner and dash past her window in all my glory. I ran into debt, of course, but finally my passion cooled. I got tired of it. This is what an actress can reduce an honest man to, dear heart. But then I was young in those days.

M. D.

July 8

My esteemed Varvara Alexeyevna,

I hasten to return the book I received on the sixth of the current month and at the same time avail myself of the opportunity to explain myself. Wasn't it wicked of you, my darling, to have sent me such a book! The Almighty gives every man the place in life which he deserves. Some are destined to wear the epaulettes of generals, others to serve as privy councillors, some to command and others to obey in fear and meekness. This is all ordained according to man's capability. Some are fit for one thing, others for another, and this is ordered by God himself. I have been working at the office for thirty years now. My service has been irreproachable, behaviour abstemious, and I have never been accused of disorderly conduct. As a citizen I in all consciousness regard myself as a man with shortcomings, but with virtues as well. I am respected by my superiors and His Excellency himself is pleased with me. I know he is pleased with me even if he has not shown special marks of favour hitherto. I have lived to a good age with no grave sins on my conscience. As to the small trespasses, who is not guilty of them? Everyone has tres-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

passed in small things, even you, my darling. But I have never been guilty of misdemeanour or disrespect, of violating the rules or disturbing the peace. No! Never! There was a time when I was even recommended for decoration. But why mention such a thing! In all fairness, you should have known all this and he, the author, should have known it too. If a man has decided to describe everything he should also know everything. I never expected such a thing of you, my dear. You, of all people, Varenka!

Does this mean that a man is not allowed to live peaceably in his little corner, such as it might be, to live as quiet as can be, fearing God and offending no one and justly expecting that others too should leave him alone, that they should not sneak into your dog kennel and pry into your private life, to see if you have a decent waistcoat, underclothes, and an extra pair of boots—resoled or not?—to see what you eat, drink and copy. What if I do tiptoe where the pavement is bad in order to preserve my boots! Why should the author tell his readers that his fellowman is sometimes in such bad straits that he has to do without his tea? As though everyone has to have tea! Do I watch every morsel that my neighbours take? Do I? Can anyone say I ever hurt anyone? Then why do others hurt me? This is what I mean, Varvara Alexeyevna: a man may be doing his work with zeal—respected even by his chief (say what you like, it is true)—and all of a sudden some scribbler pops up to make a fool of him. He may, of course, get something new made for himself once in a while. He may, it is true, be so elated as to lie awake at night. It's true, I have experienced it. That is just the way I felt, for instance, when I was putting on my new boots. It was sinfully pleasant because it was a delight to see one's feet in such fine leather. Granted that the author has described this accurately. Still, I'm really surprised that Fyodor Fyodorovich did not protest against this book. It is true, he is still a young official and likes to shout at us sometimes. But why shouldn't he? Why shouldn't he haul us over the coals? The small fry should be hauled over the coals once in a while! True, he sometimes does it for the sake of authority. And why shouldn't he? He has to put us in our place, to put the fear of God into us

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

because, between ourselves, Varenka, we small fry are quite worthless without the fear of God and each of us thinks only of being a member of the staff some place, any place: the main thing is to belong, not to work. And as there are different ranks and each of them calls for its own kind of hauling over the coals, the tone used differs according to the different rank. How else should it be? Such is the way of the world, darling. Each of us sets himself up over the others and some haul the others over the coals. Without this precaution there would be an end to the world, an end to order. I am truly astonished that Fyodor Fyodorovich put up with such impertinence.

What is the good of writing such things? What is the use of it? Will the reader present me with a new service coat? Or with a new pair of boots? Nothing of the kind, Varenka. He will just read it all and ask for more. One is so careful to hide one's shortcomings, so careful to keep to oneself because of gossip: every molehill may be turned into a mountain—and before you know it, there is the whole of your civic and family life laid brazenly bare in a book, laughed at and bandied about. How can one show oneself in the street after that! Everything has been so exactly described that we will be recognised by the way we walk! It would not have been so bad, perhaps, if the author had come to his senses towards the end of the book and had somehow softened it down a bit by saying, after the description of how they tossed bits of paper over him, something to this effect: for all that, he was a good, virtuous man, did not deserve such treatment at the hands of his comrades, obeyed his superiors (here it is advisable to cite some example), bore no malice, believed in God and died (if the author insists that he should die) mourned by his family and friends. It would have been still better not to let him die, poor fellow, but let him retrieve his service coat, let him be summoned by His Excellency who, after due inquiries as to his virtues, promotes him in rank and raises his salary—so that virtue triumphs and vice is duly punished in the persons of his comrades. That is how I should have written it. And what is good about the way he wrote the story? He just described a trivial episode in our nasty workaday existence. How could you have brought

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

yourself to send me such a book, my precious? It's a pernicious book, Varenka. It is simply untrue because there cannot be such a clerk. A complaint ought to be lodged against such a book, Varenka.

Your obedient servant,

Makar Devushkin

July 27

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

The things that have been happening lately and your last letters have caused me great anxiety and made me wonder, until Fedora explained it all. Why give way to despair and fall into such an abyss, Makar Alexeyevich? Your explanations have not satisfied me. As you now see I should have taken that remunerative post after all. Besides, my last adventure has really frightened me. You say that it was for the love of me that you have been concealing things. I always felt indebted to you though I used to believe that the money you were spending on me came from your savings in the bank. How must I feel now that I have learned that you never had any money at all, that you have been drawing your salary in advance only because you pitied my condition, that you sold your coat when I was ill. What shall I do! My poor Makar Alexeyevich! You should have stopped it all after those first kindnesses bestowed on me out of sympathy and feeling of kinship. You shouldn't have squandered money on luxuries. You are not a real friend: you were not frank with me, Makar Alexeyevich, and now that I know that your last kopeks were spent on clothes, on sweets, theatre tickets, books and amusements I am paying dearly for my unforgivable thoughtlessness. (Didn't I accept everything without thinking of your needs?) And all the things with which you hoped to bring me joy have brought grief and futile regrets. I had noticed your depression of late and felt uneasy too, but the thing that actually happened surpassed my worst fears. Good God! How could you lose your self-possession so completely, Makar Alexeyevich? What will people say! To think that you, who were so re-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

spected for modesty, prudence and kindness, have lapsed into such a disgusting vice, of which, I believe, you had never been suspected before. What was I to feel when I learned from Fedora that you were found intoxicated in the streets and were brought home by the police? I could hardly believe my ears, though I had expected something out of the ordinary since you had not come to visit me for four days. Had you thought, Makar Alexeyevich, what your chiefs would say when they learned the real cause of your absence?

You write that everybody is laughing at you, that they have learned about our friendship and that your neighbours often mention my name in their jibes. For the love of God, Makar Alexeyevich, pay no attention to them and compose yourself. I'm also worried about that incident you had with the officers. Some vague rumours have reached me. Please tell me all about it. You wrote that you were afraid to tell me the whole truth, afraid you would lose my friendship, that you were in despair because you did not know how to help me in my illness and how to keep me out of the hospital, that you had sold everything, had borrowed as much money as you could and that your landlady was making trouble every day. You could have done nothing worse than to conceal all this from me. And anyway I know it now. You were ashamed to make me admit that I was the cause of your troubles, but have actually doubled my grief by your conduct. This is crushing, Makar Alexeyevich! Ah, my friend, misfortune is contagious! Those who are poor and unhappy should keep away from one another. I have brought you troubles you have never had before in all your modest and retired existence. The thought is tormenting and killing me.

Tell me frankly just what has happened to you and how you came to such a state. Tell me something comforting, if possible. It isn't selfishness that makes me ask for this, but my friendship which nothing can drive from my heart. Good-bye. I am impatient for your answer. It was wrong of you, Makar Alexeyevich, to think of me as you did.

Your affectionate

Varvara Dobrosyolova

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

July 28

My priceless child, Varvara Alexeyevna,

Now that it is all done with and over and my life is settling into its usual course, I can inform you of this: you were worried about what people might think and so I hasten to assure you that my honour is more dear to me than anything else in the world. In consequence of which I inform you herewith about my adversities and state that my superiors haven't the faintest idea about them and never will. And so they continue to hold me in respect as of old. Only one thing worries me: gossip. The screaming of my landlady has been reduced to a grumble by your ten rubles with which I paid part of my arrears. As for the others, they cause no trouble, no trouble at all so long as I don't try to borrow any more from them. I will conclude my explanations with this statement, my darling: your esteem is more important to me than anything in the world and fully compensates me for all my temporary reverses. Thank God, the first squalls of the storm are over and you do not regard me as a false friend and a selfish person because I could not bear to let you go away and so deceived you, loving you as I did, my darling little angel. I have returned to my work with double zeal and cope with my duties excellently. Yevstafy Ivanovich didn't say a word when I passed him yesterday. I won't conceal, my darling, that I am crushed by my debts and the state of my wardrobe. But it really does not matter and I beg you not to worry. The fifty-kopek piece you sent me has cut me to the heart. So it has come to this. It is not I, old fool that I am, who is helping you, but you, my poor defenceless orphan, who is helping me. It was nice of Fedora to have got that money. For the time being, my darling, I have no real prospects of getting money. Should any turn up, I shall let you know at once. But gossip—it worries me most of all. Good-bye, my angel. I kiss your little hands and pray that you may get well soon. I cannot write in greater detail because I have to hurry

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

to the office. I must make amends for my negligence. This evening I'll write about the other things that happened and my trouble with those officers.

Your respectful and affectionate friend,

Makar Devushkin

July 28

Ah, Varenka, Varenka!

It is you who ought to be ashamed of yourself now and not I! It will remain on your conscience for ever. Your last letter left me completely bewildered; but searching my heart I saw that I had been right, perfectly right. I am not referring to that brawl of mine of course (enough of that, my darling, enough!) but to the fact that I am fond of you and that it is not at all imprudent to be fond of you, not at all. You know nothing about it, dear heart. If you really knew why I can't help being fond of you, you would not say the things you did. It is your head alone that is speaking. I'm sure your heart would tell another story.

To be honest, my darling, I cannot remember just what took place exactly between me and those officers. I must say, my dear, that I had been in embarrassing circumstances. For an entire month I had been hanging on, by a single thread, so to say; it was a nasty situation. I kept things hidden from you and from my neighbours as well. But my landlady raised a terrible row. I did not care, of course. Let the old witch shout to her heart's content. But first of all it was a disgrace and then, she had learned, God knows how, about our letters and began yelling such things that I had to stop my ears. Unfortunately, the others did not stop theirs but on the contrary pricked them up. Even now, my dear, I feel greatly ashamed. . . .

And so, Varenka, all these different troubles coming one on top of the other had nearly finished me. And then I heard the strangest things from Fedora that some wretch came to your dwelling and insulted you with his despicable proposals. How deeply you were hurt by this, my dear,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

I was able to judge from the pain it caused me. It was then that I lost my head—went off the deep end. I rushed off, Varenka, in an impossible frenzy and wanted to go straight to that sinful wretch. I did not know just what I was going to do, but I could not bear to have you insulted, my little angel. It was so sad and, to make matters worse, it was raining and the streets were so wet and slippery, so terribly depressing. I had almost changed my mind and was about to turn back—and then came my downfall. I ran into Yemelya, that is, Yemelyan Ilyich. He is a clerk, that is, he was a clerk until they discharged him; and what he does for a living now is more than I can say. And so the two of us went together. And then—but what pleasure will you find, Varenka, in reading the story of your friend's misfortunes and temptations? On the evening of the third day Yemelya goaded me into calling upon that officer. I learned the address from the janitor. Speaking of that officer, my dear, I had long noticed that there was something wrong about the fellow: I had watched him when he lived in our house. Now I see that I was guilty of an indiscretion because, to tell the truth, I was not altogether sober when I was ushered in. I can't remember a thing, Varenka, except that the room was full of officers—or perhaps I was seeing double—God knows. I cannot remember just what I said, but I know that I said a good deal in my indignation. Then they turned me out of the room and even threw me down the stairs, that is, they did not exactly throw me down, just pushed me out of the house. You have already learned how I came home and that is all there is to tell. My dignity, of course, was injured, but no one knows about this, that is, no strangers do. Since you are the only person who knows, it is as though it never happened. Isn't that so, Varenka? What I do know for certain is that last year Aksenty Osipovich insulted Pyotr Petrovich at the office in a similar fashion. But it was done secretly, so secretly. He first called him to the janitor's room—I saw it all through a chink in the door—and then settled scores with him there, but in an honourable way—privately. As for me, it didn't matter, since I said nothing about it to anyone. Pyotr Petrovich and Aksenty Osipovich then went on as if nothing had

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

happened. Pyotr Petrovich was very dignified and kept silent about the matter. After this they shook hands and bowed to each other. I won't argue, Varenka, I dare not. I have fallen low, very low indeed. And worst of all, I have fallen in my own opinion. That must have been ordained from above. And who shall escape the hand of destiny. So now you have the full story of my misfortunes and adversities, Varenka. They are not really worth reading about. I am not quite well, my darling; I have lost all the gaiety of my disposition. And permit me to assure you of my esteem, love and affection and to remain, my dear Varvara Alexeyevna,

Your obedient servant,

Makar Devushkin

July 29

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

I read your two letters and gasped! My poor friend! Either you have withheld a part of your troubles or.... Really, Makar Alexeyevich, judging by your letters you have some trouble you do not tell me about. Please come to see us without fail today. Better yet, come and have dinner with us. You did not even tell me how you manage to live from day to day, how you get on with that landlady of yours. You seem to keep silent about it deliberately. Good-bye, my friend, and be sure to come. You would do better to have your dinners with us always. Fedora is a good cook. Good-bye.

Yours,

Varvara Dobrosyolova

August 1

Varvara Alexeyevna, dear heart,

You are happy, my dearest, that God has sent you the opportunity to repay kindness with kindness. I am sure of it, Varenka, because I'm so sure of the goodness of your

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

heart. Only don't chide me—I don't mean to reproach you of course—for having kicked over the traces in my old age. Well, so it was a sin—if you insist. But it hurts me so much to hear it from you, my little friend. Don't be angry with me for saying such things. My heart is so sore. Poor people are cranky. That is the way they are born, I suppose. I have felt this even before. A poor man is always suspicious, he is constantly watching all who pass from the corner of his eye wondering whether they are speaking of him and what they are saying of him—perhaps they are saying: "What a poor wretch! What can he be thinking of? What a sorry figure he cuts from this side or that!" And as everyone knows, Varenka, a poor man is worth less than rubbish and can be respected by no one—no matter what the scribblers say—everything will continue as of old. And why? Because they expect a poor man to wear everything inside out, for all to see; to have nothing innermost, nothing that is sacred to him. As to self-respect—not for him! The other day Yemelya told me that a subscription was raised for him once, and for every ten-kopek piece he received he had to endure something like an official inspection. They thought they were giving the money away, but actually they were paying for the spectacle of a poor man. Charity is strangely distributed nowadays. Or perhaps it has always been so, who knows. Either they don't know how to go about it or they know it only too well. So that is how it is, my dear. Of other things we may know very little, but of this one thing we know more than is good for us. And why? Because of experience, because we are sure to see some gentleman on his way to his café saying to himself: "Now I wonder what that shabby clerk will have for dinner today? I'll have *sautée papilliotte* and he will eat porridge without butter most likely." Why should he care what I eat? There really are gentlemen like that, Varenka. They are nasty scribblers constantly watching you to see whether you put your foot down gingerly or not, or whether some poor clerk of such and such a department has his bare toes sticking out from his broken boots, or whether he is out at the elbows—and then he goes home and writes it all down and gets this trash printed. Now, my dear sir, what business is it of yours if

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

I am out at the elbows? Forgive my indelicacy, Varenka, but on this score a poor man has as much shame as a maiden. You would not disrobe—excuse my rudeness—before strangers, and similarly a poor man does not like to have anyone poking his nose into his kennel, into his family relations. And that is just the trouble! And now to be hurt by you, Varenka, as if you were siding with my enemies who sullied my good name and self-esteem.

At the office, too, I sat feeling terribly small, like a mangy sparrow. I burn with shame to think of it. How can I help being ashamed of my elbows peeping through the sleeves or the buttons swinging on their threads like bells. As ill luck would have it, it was worse today than usual. It was enough to discourage anyone. Even Stepan Karlovich noticed something. Talking of some business matter he suddenly broke off and said: "My poor Makar Alexeyevich," and then stopped short. But I guessed the rest and blushed so that even my bald pate was flaming. It is nothing, of course, but annoying just the same. Could they have got wind of something? God forbid that they have! To tell the truth, there is a man whom I very strongly suspect. To the scribblers it's nothing. Those scoundrels will sell your private life for a kopek. Nothing is sacred to them.

I know whose handiwork this is. Ratazyaev's and no other's. He is acquainted with someone in our ministry and might have told him all about it, with many embellishments too. Or perhaps he spoke of it in his own ministry and it has seeped through to ours. My neighbours know all about it, all to the last man. I even saw them pointing at your window. When I went to have dinner with you they all poked their heads out of the windows and the landlady said that the old devil had taken up with an infant and called you a bad name. But what is all this compared to Ratazyaev's vicious intention to put us in a book and describe us in subtle satire? He has said as much and I have been warned by good people. I'm at my wits' end, darling. What should we do? God wishes to punish us, my angel. You promised to send me a book to while away the time. Never mind the book. What's a book, after all? Just a lot of prattle! And a novel is stuff and nonsense, too, written

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

for the amusement of idlers! Don't I know it from long experience? And if they talk Shakespeare to you and say: "In literature, you see, there is Shakespeare," you may be sure it is stuff and nonsense like the rest. It's all nonsense and slander and good only for lampoons.

Yours,

Makar Devushkin

August 2

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

Do not worry about anything. With God's help all will be well. Fedora has secured a great deal of work for both of us and we have begun with a will. Perhaps we shall set everything right. She suspects that those latest troubles of mine are somehow connected with Anna Fyodorovna, but what is the difference? Today I am strangely gay. I've learnt that you intend to borrow money again. God forbid! You'll have endless trouble when the time for repayment comes. Please remember that you are our closest friend, come to see us more often and pay no attention to your landlady. As for the rest of your enemies and ill-wishers, I'm sure that your fears are imaginary, Makar Alexeyevich. I told you that your way of writing was very uneven and it still is. Farewell, until we meet again. I expect you to visit us soon.

Yours,

V. D.

August 3

Varvara Alexeyevna, my little angel,

I hasten to tell you, my dearest heart, that my hopes are rising. But how can you ask, my little angel, that I should borrow no money? It is quite impossible, my love.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Here I am, without money, and what if something happens to you, God forbid? You are so delicate. And so I say that it is absolutely necessary to borrow. But to continue:

First let me tell you, Varvara Alexeyevna, that at the office I sit beside Yemelyan Ivanovich; not the Yemelyan I told you about. This one is a titular councillor* like myself. He and I are probably the oldest employees in the place. He is a kind, unselfish person, but never says anything and looks like a boor. Still, he is very efficient, and his handwriting is pure copperplate! To tell the truth, no worse than mine. He's a worthy man, in short. We have never been really friendly, but only on greeting terms. Naturally, whenever I needed a penknife I would ask him: "Would you kindly lend me your penknife, Yemelyan Ivanovich?" And so on. . . . But today he suddenly said to me: "A penny for your thoughts, Makar Alexeyevich." I could feel that he wished me well and so told him everything. That is, not everything. I didn't have the courage. But simply that I was in straitened circumstances and all that. "But my dear friend," says Yemelyan Ivanovich, "why don't you borrow some money from Pyotr Petrovich? He lends money on interest. I used to borrow money from him myself. And the interest is reasonable, not extortionate." And how my heart did leap when I heard that, Varenka. Perhaps God will whisper into Pyotr Petrovich's ear and urge him to lend me that money. I have already been calculating how to pay the landlady and how to help you and buy the things I need myself. As you know, I'm a frightful sight. It makes my flesh creep to sit there like that. Besides, my tormentors are making fun of me, may God forgive them. His Excellency, too, passes our desks sometimes. What if he, may God have mercy on me, should notice how I am dressed. He is so strict about tidiness. He might pass and say nothing, of course, but I would die of the disgrace. That is why I finally had to hide my shame in my ragged pockets and go to Pyotr Petrovich more dead than alive with fear, but full of expectation. And imagine, Varenka, that it should have all come to nothing, nothing at all. Pyotr Petrovich was busy talking to Fedosei Ivano-

* One of the lowest ranks in the fourteen-grade system of the bureaucratic hierarchy.—*Ed.*

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

vich when I sidled up and tugged at his sleeve as though to say: "Pyotr Petrovich, eh!" When he turned I explained that it was thirty rubles that I needed, and so on. At first he did not seem to understand me and when I had explained it again he laughed and that was all. I began to explain it all over again until he said: "What security have you?" Then he grew absorbed in his papers and seemed to forget all about me. This put me out a bit. "No, Pyotr Petrovich," I answered, "I have no security. But I'll return the money as soon as I get my salary. I'll return it to be sure. You may be sure I'll return it." Here someone called him away and I stood waiting, but when he came back he began to trim his pen as though I did not exist. So I went at it again: "Can't it be done somehow, Pyotr Petrovich?" But he didn't seem to hear. I stood and stood there and finally decided to have a last try and tugged at his sleeve again. Do you think he said so much as a word? Nothing of the kind. He finished trimming his pen and began to write. And so I went away.

Perhaps they are all very worthy people, my darling, but so proud, ah so proud, and so very far removed from us, Varenka. Why am I writing all this, my dear? When I told Yemelyan Ivanovich he laughed and shook his head, but he gave me heart, bless him. He is a worthy man and promised to recommend me to an acquaintance, an official of the fourteenth class, who lives on the Vyborg Side and lends money on interest. Yemelyan Ivanovich says that he is sure to lend me the money. I shall go to see him tomorrow. Shall I? God grant that I get the money: the landlady is driving me from the house and gives me no dinner. My boots, too, are completely worn and some buttons are missing.... Ah, what is not missing in my wardrobe! What if one of our chiefs should get a good look at my disreputable figure. There is no end to our troubles, Varenka, no end!

Makar Devushkin

August 4

Makar Alexeyevich, my kind friend,

For the love of God borrow the money as quickly as you can! I would never ask for your help under the present

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

circumstances, but if you only knew in what a position we are! We cannot stay in this house any longer. I have had so much trouble and can hardly tell you how agitated I am. This morning an elderly man, almost an old man, wearing decorations, came to see me. I do not know him and could not imagine what he wanted. Fedora was out shopping. He asked me how I lived and without waiting for an answer explained that he was the uncle of that officer; that he was very angry with his nephew for the way he had behaved, making us the talk of the whole house. He said that his nephew was only a young good-for-nothing and that he, the uncle, was ready to give me his protection. He advised me to ignore the young people and added that he sympathised with me like a father, that his feelings were paternal and that he was ready to help me. I stood blushing, not knowing what to say, but in no hurry to thank him. He took my hand against my will, fondled my cheek saying that I was very pretty, that he was very pleased with my dimples (God knows why) and finally he tried to kiss me, pleading that he was only an old man (and a nasty old man at that). Just then Fedora came back. He was a little embarrassed and again assured me that he respected me for my modesty and good sense and hoped that I would not regard him as a stranger. Then he took Fedora aside and tried to give her money under some strange pretext. Fedora refused, of course. Finally he got ready to go, repeating his assurances and saying that he would come to visit me again and would bring me a pair of earrings. (He seemed to be embarrassed himself.) He also advised me to move to a better apartment, one which he had in mind, and which would cost me nothing. Again he declared that he liked me immensely because I was such an honest and sensible girl, and urged me to beware of the corrupt youth. At last he admitted that he knew Anna Fyodorovna and that she had instructed him to tell me that she would come to visit me in person. Then I understood everything. I can hardly tell you how I felt. This was the first time in my life that I found myself in such a position. I lost my temper and roundly told him what I thought of him. Fedora supported me, and turned him out almost using force. We are sure

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

that it is Anna Fyodorovna's doing; how else could he have learnt about us?

Now I appeal to you, Makar Alexeyevich. Don't desert me in such a position. Please borrow some money, even if it isn't much, because we have to move, we simply cannot remain here any longer, and Fedora is of the same opinion. We need at least twenty-five rubles. I'll return the money, I'll earn it, Fedora will find more work for me to do. And so please borrow the money regardless of the interest. I'll return it all, only help me. It is painful to trouble you now when your own circumstances are so bad, but you are my only hope. Good-bye, Makar Alexeyevich. Think of me and with God's help do your best.

V. D.

August 4

My precious darling, Varvara Alexeyevna,

How shaken I am by all these unexpected blows! How these disasters shatter my spirit! This rabble of lickspittles and old wretches will harass you into illness, my angel, and drive you to your death bed, and those lickspittles want to be the death of me too. And they will be, I swear they will. I would rather die than not find the money for you now. If I don't help you, it will kill me, Varenka, it will kill me for certain, and if I do you will fly away, like a bird from a nest upon which ferocious owls have descended. It worries me so, my darling. And you, Varenka, how could you be so cruel, how could you? You are suffering, you are hurt and tormented, my little chick, and yet you have scrupled to trouble me and assure me so pitifully that you will return the money, that is, that you will be ruining your frail health in order to meet the interest on time. Think well, Varenka, before saying such things. Why should you slave and sew and worry your little head and ruin your sweet eyes and undermine your health? Ah, Varenka, Varenka! I myself know that I am fit for nothing, but I shall force myself to be fit for something, after all. Nothing will deter me. I'll get extra work.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

I'll copy papers for the writers, I'll go to them myself and beg them to give me some work. Surely, they need someone who can copy well; I know they do. I just won't permit you to work yourself ill; I won't allow you to carry out your disastrous intentions. I shall certainly borrow the money somehow, my angel. I would rather die than fail. You say that I should not be afraid of the heavy interest. Don't worry, my darling, I am not afraid of anything now. I am going to ask for forty rubles in bank-notes. That is not too much, is it? Can I be trusted with forty rubles? Will they take my word and nothing more? Am I capable of inspiring confidence at first sight? That is, can a first glance at my face make a favourable impression? Just visualise my person, darling, and tell me: can I inspire all this? What do you think of it? I'm very nervous now—it is really painful. Of the forty rubles I shall set aside twenty-five for you, Varenka, two rubles for my landlady and the rest for my own needs. The landlady, of course, ought to receive more. She is entitled to it, in fact. But just consider my needs, Varenka, and you will see that I really cannot give her more. And so, why talk about it, or even mention it? A ruble in silver will be enough for a new pair of boots. I'm afraid my old boots will not carry me to the office even tomorrow. A neckerchief, too, would be welcome: the one I have is a year old. But then, you promised to cut a neckerchief for me out of your apron, and a dickey too. So there is no need to worry about these. And so I shall have a new pair of boots and a neckerchief. But what shall we do about buttons, my little friend? You will agree, my little Varenka, that I cannot do without buttons. On one side of my jacket they are all gone and I tremble at the thought that His Excellency may notice such untidiness and say—just what he will say, I shall never know, my darling, because I shall be dead before I hear it; I shall simply die on the spot for shame. That will leave me three rubles for my living expenses and for half a pound of tobacco. I cannot do without tobacco, my little one, and it is nine days since I have smoked my pipe. I could buy it and say nothing about it to you, but I would be ashamed to do such a thing. You are in dreadful trouble, and here I am indulging in luxuries. I am writing all

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

this, Varenka, to unburden my conscience. I must tell you frankly, my dear, that I am now in straitened circumstances, or rather that it has never been as bad as this before. My landlady despises me, no one respects me anymore; there are so many things I need and I am appallingly in debt; the clerks at the office have always been unbearable, and now even more so. I take such care to conceal everything from everybody; I try to conceal even myself; I do my best to slip in unnoticed and keep strictly to myself. It is only to you that I have the courage to speak. And what if I fail to get the money? No, no, Varenka, we had better not think of that, not torture ourselves with such thoughts. I am writing this so that you should not worry, you should not torment yourself with this evil thought. Good God, what will become of you then! You won't be able to move and will still be near me, it is true—but then, I shall never return, I shall simply vanish, fade away. I ought to be shaving instead of writing so much. I shall look more presentable perhaps and, as you know, it is the presentable who are trusted, may God help me. I shall say my prayers and start on my way.

M. Devushkin

August 5

My esteemed Makar Alexeyevich,

You, at least, must not give way to despair! We have troubles enough. I am sending you thirty kopeks in silver; I cannot send more. Buy only what you need most to last till tomorrow. Fedora and I have almost nothing; and what we shall do tomorrow I do not know. It is very sad, Makar Alexeyevich. But do not grieve so. You had no luck, and there's no helping it. Fedora thinks that we might as well continue to live here, and that even if we moved to another place, they would find us if they wanted to. Only it's somehow not nice staying on here. I would write more, if I did not feel so sad.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

What a strange person you are, Makar Alexeyevich. How you do take things to heart. This will always make you the unhappiest of men. I read your letters very attentively and can see that you worry over me far more than yourself. Everyone will say, of course, that you have a kind heart, but I'll say that it is too kind. Permit me to give you some friendly advice, Makar Alexeyevich. I am grateful, very grateful for everything you have done for me. I am deeply sensitive about it. Imagine, therefore, how I feel when I see that after all your disasters, of which I was the unwitting cause, you continue to share my joys and sorrows, to live for my affection alone. Taking other people's troubles to heart as you do, it is no wonder that you are the unhappiest of men. You frightened me when you came to see me after office hours today. You looked so pale, terrified, and desperate—and all because you were afraid to tell me that you had failed, afraid to upset me. And how relieved you were when you saw that I was almost ready to laugh. Do not worry and take on so, Makar Alexeyevich. Do be sensible, I beg of you. Everything will turn out well, you will see! Or else your life will be very hard, grieving for other people as you do. Good-bye, my friend. Don't worry over me so, I beg of you.

V. D.

August 5

Varenka, my little dove,

Very well then, my angel, very well! You say that it does not matter so much, even if I failed to get the money. Very well then. I am reassured and almost happy on your account. I am even glad that you will continue to live here and will not forsake this poor old man. To tell you the truth, I was delighted with your letter, with the way you do credit to my sentiments. And I am not saying this out of pride, but only because I see that you love me and show every consideration for the feelings of my heart. But why speak of my heart? My heart, after all, is only my heart; but then you have said, my darling, that I should not be faint of heart. Perfectly true, my darling. One should not

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

be faint of heart. And still, my little one, there are boots to think about, boots in which to go to the office tomorrow! That is where the trouble lies. Such broodings can destroy a man, destroy him completely. And it is not on my own account that I am tormenting myself. For my part, I would not care at all even if I had to go out coatless and barefooted in the bitterest frost. I'd endure it, I'd stand everything, it wouldn't matter to me, I am only a little man, a very ordinary man. But what would people say? What malicious things my enemies would say if they saw me walking about without a coat! That is why one wears a coat, and boots too perhaps. And so you see, Varenka, the boots are necessary to preserve my honour and good name. In torn boots one can lose the one and the other. You may be sure that this is true, my darling. I have learned it from years of experience. And so you had better believe me, an old man who knows what the world and the people in it are like, and never listen to those pen-pushers and scribblers.

But I have not yet told you, dear heart, how it all happened today. What I went through and suffered this morning would suffice another for a whole year. This is what happened: I set off in the wee hours of the morning so as to find him at home and not be late at the office. It was raining and there were puddles everywhere. I walked along, huddled in my coat and thinking: "Merciful God, forgive me my sins and answer my prayer, just this once!" Passing a church I crossed myself, and again asked God to forgive me my sins but remembered that it was not right to make terms with Him. And so I went on, lost in thought, and splashing blindly through the mud. The streets were empty and the few who did walk by were preoccupied and anxious like me. And why wouldn't they be—walking in such weather at such an hour. I met a band of grimy workmen and they jostled me, the louts. Suddenly I grew nervous and uneasy. I did not care about the money any more—just another attempt and I would give up! As I reached Voskresensky Bridge the sole of my boot began to flap and it was difficult to go on. And whom should I meet just then if not Yermolayev—he is only a copyist, not even a junior clerk. He stopped short when

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

he saw me, stiffened to attention, and followed me with his eyes as though expecting a copper coin to drink my health. "Ah!" I thought, "drink my health, would you? Who cares about it now?" I felt terribly tired, stopped to rest for a while and then plodded on. I looked around for something to hang my thoughts on, something diverting, something encouraging; but no, not a single thought occurred to me, and I only splashed into a puddle and got so dirty that I almost wept from vexation. From afar, I saw a yellow wooden house with a gabled attic serving as a second floor. "This," I thought, "is Markov's house, just as Yemelyan Ivanovich described it." (The Markov who lends money on interest.) But I was nervous and though I know it was Markov's house, I made sure of it by asking a watchman. "Whose house is this, my friend?" I asked. The answer was unfriendly, a surly watchman's answer: "This is Markov's house, if you want to know." Watchmen are so unfeeling. The watchman did not matter, of course, but still I was left with a bad taste in my mouth. As you know, one thing leads to another and every trifle seems to have a bearing on one's situation. I passed the house three times and found it harder and harder to enter. "He won't give me the money," I thought. "Never! I am a total stranger, unattractive in appearance and the matter so delicate—but then let the fates decide! I'll do it if only not to reproach myself later; they won't eat me up, after all." And so I gently opened the gate and went in; but then there was some more trouble—a worthless little cur which jumped about barking its head off. It is just such a nasty trifle as this that can drive a man mad, shatter his composure and upset all his decisions. I entered the house more dead than alive, and there ran into more trouble. At the very threshold I stumbled over an old woman—I hadn't noticed her in the dust—who was busy with some jugs of milk she was straining. The jugs were upset of course. How she shrilled and shrieked at me! "What could you be wanting here!" And so on over and over again! I am writing this, Varenka, because such things always happen to me under these circumstances. It is my fate: I am always blundering into difficulties. The commotion brought the Finnish landlady, a terrible harridan, to the scene. I asked her if Mar-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

kov lived there and she said that he did not. But looking me over carefully, she must have changed her mind because she inquired what I wanted to see the gentleman for. I explained that I had been sent by Yemelyan Ivanovich and told her everything. The old hag now called for her daughter, a rather tall barefooted girl. "Call father," she said, "he is upstairs with the tenants." And to me: "Please come in."

The room was comfortable enough; there were pictures on the walls, mostly generals, there was a sofa, a round table and mignonette and balsam pots on the window-sill. Perhaps I had better go while the going is good, I thought. I came near to running away, my darling. I had already decided to return on the morrow; the weather would be better then, with no milk overturned, and the generals on the walls looking less angry. I was just making for the door when he entered. A little grey old man with shifty eyes, in a greasy dressing-gown caught about at the waist with a length of rope. He asked me what I wanted of him, and I told him of Yemelyan Ivanovich and forty rubles and all that—but did not finish. By his eyes alone I could see that I had failed. "You need the money urgently," he said, "but I haven't any. And what can you give me as security?" I explained that I had no security to offer, but talked again of Yemelyan Ivanovich and again assured him that it was very urgent. "What has Yemelyan Ivanovich to do with it?" he asked. "I have no money." Of course not, I thought. I had known it all along. Ah, Varenka, if only the earth could have opened and swallowed me then! My legs turned to ice and a chill ran down my spine. I was looking at him and he at me, his eyes saying: "Get going, there's nothing for you here!" If this were not a business matter, I should have been quite embarrassed. "What do you need the money for?" (this is actually what he asked, my darling). I began to talk again only for the sake of saying something, but he was no longer listening. "No, I have no money," he said again. "I am sorry." But I kept urging and pleading, promising to return the money in time, even ahead of time and with any interest he might want. Couldn't he let me have even a little of it? At that moment I was thinking of you, my

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

darling, of that half ruble you gave me, of all our troubles and needs. "No," he said again, "don't talk of interest; you must offer something as security. I have no money, and, by God, I am sorry!" By God! Taking God's name in vain, the robber!

I really cannot remember how I left the house, how I got to Voskresensky Bridge. I was tired and chilled to the bone and reached the office late, at 10 o'clock. I should have liked to brush my clothing, but the watchman, Snegiryov, would not let me. He was afraid that I might spoil the brush and the brush, after all, belongs to the office. And so you see, my darling, I'm no better than a door mat for these lordships too. It is this that is killing me, Varenka, not the lack of money, but this misery, the smiles, the jokes and insinuations. What if His Excellency should hear of it by some accident! I have fallen on evil days.

I have reread all your letters today, my darling. How sad it all is. Good-bye, dear. God bless you!

M. Devushkin

P.S. I had meant to describe my troubles jestingly, Varenka, but it hasn't turned out that way. I wanted to please you. I'll call on you, my darling. I shall surely visit you tomorrow.

August 11

Varvara Alexeyevna, my little dove, my dearest,

I am lost! We are both hopelessly lost! Everything lies in ruins; my reputation, my honour. I am ruined and you are ruined too, my poor darling, you too are ruined irrevocably together with me. I, I am the cause of your ruin. They are persecuting me, reviling and ridiculing me, and my landlady actually cursed me; she shouted and shouted at me today, scolded and scolded me, treating me no better than a chip of wood. And at Ratazyaev's party someone read aloud a rough copy of a letter I had written to you, a letter which had fallen out of my pocket. How they did make fun of us and said all sorts of things; they were sim-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

ply howling with laughter, the traitors. I entered the room and denounced Ratazyaev as a perfidious friend, a traitor. But he came back at me saying that I was a traitor myself, a past hand of *conquete*. He called me a secretive person and a Mr. Lovelace. And that is what everybody calls me now: Mr. Lovelace. It is horrible, my darling, but they know everything, all there is to know, about you and me. To think that even Faldoni has followed suit. When I asked him to go to the grocery for something, he refused and said he was too busy. "But it's your duty," I told him. "No, it is not," he retorted, "because you don't pay your rent." I could not bear such an insult from a stupid peasant and called him a fool. And what did he answer? "Fool yourself!" I could not believe that he was sober: "You are drunk, you stupid lout!" But he came back with: "You treated me to a glass, I don't think! Why, you can't even buy yourself a drink to come to your senses after the night before! You're always begging ten kopek alms from that piece." And to all this he added: "And you call yourself a gentleman!" That is what we have come to, dear heart. I am ashamed to go on living. I am treated like an outcast, worse than a vagrant without a passport. Horrible, horrible! I am done for, lost beyond redemption.

M. D.

August 13

Misfortune upon misfortune, my esteemed Makar Alexeyevich! I scarcely know what to do. What is to become of you? Of what good can I be to you now? I have injured my hand today with the iron. It slipped from my fingers and burned and bruised me both. What shall I do now? I cannot work and Fedora has been ill for three days. I am awfully worried. I am sending you thirty kopeks in silver. This is nearly all we have. God knows I should have liked to help you more. It is enough to make one weep. Goodbye, my dear friend. I would be much comforted if you called on me today.

V. D.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

August 14

Makar Alexeyevich!

What has come over you? Have you lost all fear of God? You will drive me mad. You ought to be ashamed, you are ruining yourself; just think of your reputation. You, a respectable and dignified man? How could you? What if they heard about it at the office? You would die of shame! Think of your grey hair, don't lose your fear of God! Fedora says she will not help you any more; and I won't either. Do you think that your conduct means nothing to me? You don't know how I suffer on your account. I hardly dare to appear on the stairs with everyone looking at me and saying all kind of things: they say that I have *taken up with a drunkard.* And when they carry you home I hear people say: "They have brought that clerk again!" I could weep for shame. I swear that I shall move away from here. I'll go to work as a maid, a laundress, but I shall not stay here.

I asked you to come to see me, but you did not. My pleading and my tears mean nothing to you, Makar Alexeyevich! And where did you get the money, I wonder? Take care of yourself, please! You are ruining yourself! And what for? I have heard that your landlady would not let you into the apartment and that you had to spend the night in the passage. What a disgrace! How awful I felt when I heard of it!

Do come to see us. You will be happy here. We shall read together and remember old times. Fedora will tell us of her pilgrimages to the holy places, and for God's sake, my dear friend, do not ruin yourself and me. It is for you alone that I am living, that I am staying here. Be an honourable man, firm in adversity and remember that it is not a sin to be poor. And why should you despair so? God is merciful and our troubles will pass. But you must bear up. I am sending you a twenty-kopek coin to buy tobacco or whatever else you may need at the moment, but please don't spend it on evil. Please come to see us. Perhaps you are ashamed to do so as you used to, but you shouldn't be. Abandon your false pride and repent sincerely. Trust in God, who will do everything for the best.

V. D.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

August 19

Varvara Alexeyevna, my sweet dear!

I am ashamed, really and truly ashamed. But by the by, my darling, what harm has been done, really? Why not gladden the heart once in a while? I forget then that the soles of my shoes are no good any more because, come to think of it, soles are nonsense and will remain ordinary, vulgar and dirty soles, all said and done. And boots, too, are nonsense. If the wise men of Greece could walk about without them, why should we bother with such unworthy things? Why then should people make fun of me and insult me? Couldn't you find something better to write about, my little darling? And tell Fedora for me that she is an unreasonable wench, a troublesome, violent wench and foolish besides, extremely foolish. As for my grey hair, you are mistaken, my darling. I am not as old as you think. Yemelya sends his regards. You write that you were crushed on my behalf, and cried. And I write that I was crushed on your behalf, and wept too. In conclusion, I wish you good health and good cheer. As for me, I am in good health, all is well with me, and I remain, my little angel,

Your friend,

Makar Devushkin

August 21

My dear and esteemed friend, Varvara Alexeyevna,

I know I am at fault, I know I deserve blame from you, but what good does it do that I know it, my love, what's the use. I felt all this before my misdeed too, and yet I fell in spirit, for all my consciousness of guilt. My dearest, I am not malicious or hard of heart. To hurt you, my child, one must have the heart of a ferocious tiger, and I have only the heart of a lamb and, as you know, am not at all inclined to be ferocious. Consequently, my dearest, I am not entirely to blame for my misdeed, nor is my heart or mind. What is to blame for it is more than I can say: it is so obscure, my dear. You sent me thirty kopeks in silver,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

and then, twenty kopeks more. And I sat there looking at those poor orphan's coins of yours with an aching heart. You have burned your hand and cannot work and will be starving soon and yet you send me money to buy tobacco. What should I have done? Plunder a poor orphan without scruple? I was so depressed, my darling. That is, I felt at first that I was worthless and not much better than the soles of my boots. And so it seemed to me quite ridiculous to regard myself as something of consequence. On the contrary, I decided to regard myself as something of no consequence, as something quite unbecoming and even indecent. And as soon as I had lost my self-respect I could not help disclaiming all my virtues and my worthiness. And this inevitably brought about my downfall. It was fate, you know. I went out for a breath of fresh air, and one thing led to another: nature was so sad and the weather cold and it was raining and there was Yemelya, and he had pawned everything, Varenka. All that he had owned had gone the same way and he hadn't had a bite to eat for two days. Now he wanted to pawn something that couldn't be pawned at all. Really, Varenka, I succumbed more out of kindliness and sympathy for the man than out of my own desire. That is how I came to sin. How we wept, the two of us, and remembered you. He is a good soul, Yemelya, tender, and kind to the core.

And I feel all this myself and that is why such things happen to me—because I feel. I know how indebted to you I am, my darling. When I came to know you, I came to know myself better and to love you. And before that, my angel, I was so alone in the world and slept rather than lived. In those days, the villains used to say that even my figure was all wrong and were so contemptuous of me that I finally grew contemptuous of myself. They used to say that I was a fool and I came to think so too. But when you appeared to me like a vision from above, you brought light into that dark existence of mine, brought light into my heart and soul and there was peace at least and I knew that I was no worse than others.

The polish was missing perhaps, and the tone and brilliance too, but I was a man at heart and in mind. And

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

now I felt that I was being persecuted by fate, humiliated, I no longer valued my own dignity and, oppressed by the weight of misfortune, I lost heart. Now that I have told you all, I beg you with tears in my eyes never to mention the matter again, for I am sad and weary and my heart is breaking.

With all respect, my darling, I remain

Your constant friend,

Makar Devushkin

September 3

I did not finish my last letter, Makar Alexeyevich. It was too difficult to write. There are moments when I want to be alone, to be alone and sad without measure; and this mood comes over me more and more often now. There is something about memories that I cannot explain, something that carries me irresistibly away so that I may be oblivious to everything for hours. There is scarcely an impression now, sad or pleasant, that does not remind me of something similar in the past, and most of all in my golden childhood. But after such moments I am always depressed. I grow weak; my dreamings exhaust me and my health is growing worse as it is.

But today we have had one of those crisp, refreshing mornings, so rare in autumn, and I welcomed it joyously. And so the autumn has come. How I used to love the autumn in the country. I was a child then, but how keenly I felt things. I liked the evenings of autumn better than the mornings. There was a lake at the foot of the hill, a short distance from the house—I can almost see it now. It was broad and bright, a great sheet of crystal. And if the evening was quiet, it lay so very still with not a murmur in the overhanging trees. The air would be so cool and bracing. The dew would settle on the grass, lights would appear in the windows beneath the thatched roofs, and the cows would be returning home. That was when I loved to slip away to look at my lake, forgetful of everything. The fishermen would be burning some brushing on

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

the shore and the light would stream far, very far across the water. The sky would be so cold and blue, painted with red, fiery streaks, and these streaks would turn paler and paler. And then the moon would rise; and the limpid air would carry all sounds like a silver bell; the wing of a bird, the slightest whisper of the rushes or the splash of a fish—you could hear everything. And then the mists would rise, so thin and transparent over the darkening surface, and in the distance all things would grow vague and disappear. But close at hand everything was so sharply etched, as if carved: the boats, the water's edge, the islets; or a barrel—abandoned or forgotten—bobbing in the water close to the shore; or a twig of broom with yellowed leaves caught in the rushes. A belated gull would dive into the cold depths and flurry off again. I would stand there looking and listening and feeling wonderfully strange. And I was only a child then.

Yes, I loved the autumn, especially the late autumn when the harvest had been taken in and all the work done, and the villagers gathered in one cottage or another to talk and sing and wait for the winter. Then everything would grow gloomier under the lowering sky, and yellow leaves lay thick at the edges of the naked forest, turning constantly darker and more blue, especially towards evening when the fogs would settle and the trees loom in the depths like giants, like huge ghosts. There were times when I happened to be out-of-doors too late or fall behind the others during a walk—and suddenly I would know that I was alone, and I hurried home stricken with panic. Trembling like a leaf I would expect some fearful face to stare at me from the hollow of a tree; and then the wind would suddenly dash through the forest and roar and moan as it swept the remaining leaves from the bare boughs and sent them whirling. And then the birds would follow in vast and noisy flocks darkening the sky and I would be filled with an unaccountable dread and seem to hear a whispering voice: "Run, my child, run away! Soon it will be terrible here. Run!" And I would run until I had lost my breath. Home at last, I would find everything so cheerful and warm; we, the children, would be set to shelling peas or poppy-heads while the damp wood crackled in the

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

stove, and mother looked on and our old nurse Ulyana told us of bygone days or tales about sorcerers and vampires. We would press closer to one another, but smile as we listened. And then there would be a hush. Hadn't someone knocked on the door? But no, it was only old Frolovna's spinning wheel; and what shouts of laughter would arise. At night we'd have terrible dreams and keep waking up. I would start up at midnight afraid to stir and lie awake till dawn, shivering under my quilt. And yet I would be up in the morning as fresh as a daisy. I would look out of the windows and see that the fields had already been clutched by the cold and that the thin hoarfrost of autumn was clinging to the naked boughs. The lake would then be covered with a film of ice, white vapour would rise from it; and the birds would be darting about with cheerful cries. But the thin crust over the lake melted quickly under the warm rays of the sun. It was a bright world, vivid and happy. And the stoves would be roaring again as we sat about the samovar and our black dog Polkan, still shaking with the cold of night, would be looking in at the window and wagging his tail so hopefully. A peasant cart would rumble by on its way to the forest for firewood. And we were all so content and so gay in those happy days.

These memories make me weep. The past stands out so bright and the present is so dreary and dark. How will it end, dear God! Do you know, I have the feeling that I will die this autumn; I am sure of it. I am very, very ill. I often think about it and do not want to die here, to be buried in this earth. Perhaps I will take to my bed again, as I did last spring. You know that I never really recovered. Now, too, I feel very ill. Fedora has been gone all day and I am quite alone. There are times when I am afraid to be alone and have the queer feeling that there is someone else in the room, someone who is speaking to me, especially when I'm startled from my reveries. That is why I have written such a long letter. The fear passes when I write. Good-bye. I must finish now because there is no more paper; and, besides, I have no time. Only one ruble in silver has remained of the money I received for my dress and hat. I am glad that you have given your

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

landlady two rubles in silver; this ought to keep her quiet for a time.

Try to have your clothing put in order. Good-bye, my friend. I am so weak and tire so easily. The slightest effort exhausts me. How shall I be able to work—even if work is to be had. The thought of it alone kills all hope.

V. D.

September 5

Varenka dear,

I have had so many impressions today. To begin with, I had a headache. To clear it away, I took a walk along the Fontanka. The evening was damp and it was dark—it gets dark soon after five, you know. There was no rain, but the fog was worse than any shower. Clouds moved across the sky in wide streaks. Crowds of people were hurrying along the embankment, a strangely ugly crowd, such a depressing sight they made. There were drunken peasants, snubnosed and bare-headed Finnish women in top-boots, workmen, cabmen, clerks of our sort, a thin consumptive apprentice in a striped smock with his face black with grease and a huge lock in his hands, and a discharged soldier, incredibly tall. It must have been the time of the day for such people to appear. And the canal itself was worth looking at. How could so many barges find room there! On the bridges sat women selling damp honey cakes and rotting apples, a lot of bedraggled, dirty women. The Fontanka is a dismal place to take a walk in. There is only wet stone underfoot and tall, smoke-blackened houses; mist on the ground and mist overhead. What a sad, dark evening it was.

When I turned into Gorokhovaya it was quite dark and they had started to light the gas lamps. I hadn't been on this street for a long time and it seemed very lively. There were the beautiful shops, large and small, and all sparkling and glittering with rich materials and flowers and ribboned hats. One might think it was all arranged just for display, but no, there really are people who buy such

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

things for their wives! A wealthy street. Many of the German bakers live here too and they are people of means. There are so many carriages one wonders how the street can support them all. And what luxurious vehicles they are, with shining windows, silk and velvet upholstery, and lackeys with swords and epaulettes. I looked into each of them as they passed, and guessed that the ladies inside were either countesses or princesses, for they were all dressed up in such finery. It must have been the time of the day when everybody goes to balls and evening parties. I would be curious to see a countess or any great lady close to; they are lovely, I am sure. I have never had the opportunity to do so unless peeping into the carriages as now. I thought of you too and how it pained me, my poor dear darling. Why should you know such misery, Varenka? My dearest little angel, in what way are you less worthy than the others? You are so kind, beautiful and learned, should your lot in life be so hard? Why should good people live in need and neglect, and others have all the happiness coming their way? I know, my darling, I know that I should not say this because it savours of free thinking. But in all fairness, why is it that fate should smile upon one while he is still in the womb and croak like a raven at another only because he was born in the poor house. As in fairy-tales, it sometimes does happen that happiness falls to Ivanushka the Fool. In that case he may rummage in the coffers of his inheritance and drink and make merry, while another poor wretch can only lick his lips and watch—that is all he is good for, all that he was born for. It is sinful, of course, to think this way, but these sinful thoughts come uninvited. Why couldn't you be riding about in one of those carriages, my darling, with generals, and not the likes of me, eager for your sweet smile? You would be wearing gold and silver then, and not poor, worn frocks of linen. And would you be as wan and frail as you are now? Nothing of the sort! You would be like a little sugar-coated ginger doll, so rosy, fresh and plump. It would be happiness enough for me to peep into your brightly lighted windows just to see your shadow and to know that you are happy and joyous. But how are things in real life? Grief, you have been brought to grief

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

by evil people, and to add insult to injury, you are now pestered by that bewhiskered piece of trash. Just because he struts about in a frock-coat and ogles you through a gold lorgnette, that coxcomb imagines that he can take liberties and you must listen to his impertinences with good grace. Why? Why? Because you are a helpless orphan without strong friends to protect you. What sort of people they must be, what sort of man is he, if he thinks nothing of insulting a defenceless orphan? A piece of trash and not a man! A man in semblance only! I'm sure of it. Why, the organ-grinder I met in Gorokhovaya Street deserves more respect. What if he does walk about the street all day in the hope of an extra kopek? He is his own master and earns his own bread. He is not a beggar, but grinds away for people's pleasure. Here! Enjoy yourselves, that is what I am for! Perhaps he is a beggar, a real beggar, but an honourable beggar for all that. Though tired and hungry, he keeps working in his own way, but working just the same. There are many who do humble work and earn very little, but will bow to no one and ask for nothing. I am exactly like that organ-grinder, that is, not exactly like him, not even at all like him, but exactly like him only in the decent, honourable sense. I work as hard as I can. What more can I do?

What made me think of the organ-grinder was that today I felt my poverty more keenly than ever. I stopped in the street to watch him play. I did this to distract myself, to keep away unpleasant thoughts. Some cabmen, a young woman and a little grimy girl stood watching too. The organ-grinder had taken up a stand under someone's windows. Now, I noticed a little boy of about ten who would have been good-looking if he were not so pinched and sickly. Almost barefooted and only in a shirt, he stood gaping and listening—boys will be boys! He could not take his eyes off the dancing doll on the barrel organ though his knees were shivering with cold and he kept sucking the sleeve of his shirt. I noticed, too, that he held a scrap of paper in his hand. Finally, some gentleman dropped a coin into the box on which the toy Frenchman and his ladies were dancing. The clink of the falling coin startled the boy and he looked timidly around. He must

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

 Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

have thought that I had dropped the coin because he ran up to me and handed me the paper with trembling fingers and in a piping voice begged me to read it. I unfolded it—it was the usual thing, of course; the usual thing about a dying mother with three starving children with an appeal to the dear kind people for help, and a promise that when the mother died, she would intercede for them on high. There was nothing singular in this, it might happen to anybody, but what was I to give him? Nothing at all. But how sorry I was! Such a poor little boy, blue with cold! And hungry, too, I'm sure. He was not lying to me. No, no, he could not be. I know it well. The nastiest thing about it is that a mother will send her unclothed child out into the cold with one of those notes. Perhaps she has simply lost heart; there is no one to help her and so she sits there doing nothing; perhaps she is really ill. Still, she ought to appeal to the proper authorities. But then, she may be simply imposing on the public by sending her weak, hungry little boy out to beg. And what sort of an upbringing will he get with those scraps of paper? There he is running about and pleading, but people have no time for him. Their hearts are like stone and their words cruel: "Off with you! None of your mischief!" The boy will grow callous as he trembles with the cold, a frightened little fledgling fallen from the nest. His hands are numb and he can hardly breathe in that chilling air. Before he knows it, he begins to cough, disease creeps into his breast like a slimy reptile, and already death stands over him, waiting in some dark and dingy corner because there is no one to care for him, no one to help him. And there is an end to his little life. That is all there is to some lives, Varenka. It is not easy to hear someone say, "Help me for the love of Christ", and pass by without giving anything and merely saying, "God will help you". There are times, of course, when the words, "For the love of Christ", are not so terrible (there are different kinds of "For the love of Christ", my darling). Some are whined mechanically in the way that beggars always do. To give such a one nothing is not nearly so tormenting. That one is hardened to it, he is the sort who will pull through somehow. But at other times, the "For the love of Christ" sounds strange, hoarse and terrifying.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Just as it sounded today when I was reading the boy's note and someone, right near the fence—he had been just standing there and not begging—said to me: "Spare me a coin, sir, for the love of Christ." The voice was so hoarse that I was startled. But what could I give him? I had nothing. The rich do not like it when the poor complain of their hard lot out loud: the rich say they are a nuisance and so impudent! Do the moans of the hungry trouble their sleep? I fear not.

To tell you the truth, my darling own, I have written all this partly to relieve my heart and partly to give you an example of my good style in writing. As you see, my dear, my style has been taking shape of late. And just now I am so despondent that I cannot help sympathising with my own thoughts; and though I know, my darling, that such sympathy will lead me nowhere, yet it is pleasant to do oneself a bit of justice. All the more so that one is usually inclined to humble oneself, to make less than nothing of oneself and rank oneself even lower than a shaving of wood. To give you a comparison, I may tell you that it is all because I am just as harassed and crushed as that little boy who asked me for alms. Forgive me, Varenka, for indulging in a little allegory: as I go to the office early in the morning, I sometimes happen to look about the city, at all the smoke, the seething and the rumbling which makes me feel so small, as if someone had snapped his fingers under my prying nose. When that happens I shrink and shuffle on, meek as a mouse. But now, my darling, let us have a closer look and see what is happening in those big dark drab houses. Look and then consider whether it is right to place oneself so low and be embarrassed on that account. Mind, Varenka, that I have been saying all this allegorically, not in the direct sense. Now what shall we see in those houses? We shall see how in some dingy corner of some dank hall, called an apartment, a workman wakes up. It is possible that all through the night he has been haunted by the thought of the shoes which he spoiled the day before. To think that a man should dream of such trash. He is a workman, of course, a cobbler and may be excused for thinking constantly of such matters. His children are whimpering and his wife is hungry. And it is not

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

only cobblers who get up with such things on their minds, my darling. It would not matter, of course, and perhaps the whole thing would not be worth mentioning if not for another circumstance, namely, that in the same house, on the floor above there is a very rich man who has also been dreaming in his gilded chamber throughout the night about shoes, that is, not exactly the same shoes, but of shoes nevertheless, and in this sense, my darling, we are all cobblers to a certain degree. And again, it would not matter, but the trouble is that there is no one to whisper into the very rich man's ear that he should stop thinking of and living for himself alone, he is not a cobbler and his children are healthy, and his wife is not hungry; why shouldn't he look around and see if he cannot find something nobler to concern himself with than his shoes. This is what I had meant to tell you allegorically. This may be an awfully free thought, Varenka, but it sometimes does occur to me and when it does, it gushes from my heart in words. And so there is no need at all to humble oneself and be afraid of all that seething and rumbling. In conclusion I will say this, my darling: you may think that I am only gossiping or that I am just in a bad mood or that I have copied it all out of some book. No, my dear, let me reassure you; there is nothing I scorn so much as gossip and I am not in a bad mood and I haven't copied anything. So there!

I came home in a melancholy mood, put the kettle on the stove and was preparing to have a cup of tea when suddenly Gorshkov, my poor neighbour, came in. In the morning I had noticed that he wanted to sidle up to me and the other tenants. In passing, I may mention, Varenka, that his life is incomparably worse than mine. Far worse! With a wife and children to feed! If I were Gorshkov I would really not know what to do. And so, Gorshkov entered the room and bowed with his eyes streaming as always and stood there scraping and unable to say a word. I offered him a chair, a broken one, because I have no other, and some tea. For a long time he kept apologising, but finally accepted the glass of tea. But he declined the sugar and began again to apologise. When I urged him to take the sugar, he argued for a long time

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

and then fished out the tiniest lump and assured me that the tea was astonishingly sweet. Lord, how poverty humbles a man! "How are you getting on, my friend?" I asked. "Thank you," he said and went on: "Couldn't you, Makar Alexeyevich, show me the charity of God and help an unfortunate family? My wife and children, you know. They have nothing to eat and you can imagine how a father feels." I was about to say something, but he interrupted again: "I am afraid of every lodger here, Makar Alexeyevich, that is, not so much afraid as ashamed to speak to them. They are so standoffish, so haughty. I would never think of troubling you, my friend and benefactor. I know that you have troubles of your own, that you cannot help me much, but please do lend me something. It was not easy to come to you for this, but I know what a kind heart you have, that you are in need like myself and more likely to feel for me in my misfortune." To this he added many apologies for his presumption and shamelessness. I said that, glad though I should have been to help him, I had nothing, absolutely nothing. "Makar Alexeyevich, my kind friend," he pleaded again, "I do not ask for much, but this is how things are (and here he turned red): my wife and children, you know. They are starving. Couldn't you spare just ten kopeks?" This made me feel so bad. Yes, the man was worse off than me. All I had at the moment was twenty kopeks; and I had been counting on this for pressing needs tomorrow. "No," I said, "I really could not." I explained why. "My dear Makar Alexeyevich, anything, anything you please, even if it's only ten kopeks!" I took my twenty-kopek piece and gave it to him. And twenty kopeks, too, is a help, isn't it, Varenka? What poverty! We began to talk and I finally asked him why he had rented a room at five rubles when he was in such straits. He explained that he had moved in six months before and had paid three months' rent in advance, hoping that his case would be settled by then. It is an unpleasant case indeed. He committed a breach of law of some sort. He is involved in the case of a merchant who defrauded the treasury. When the matter was discovered the rascal was tried and then embroiled Gorshkov. Now the truth is that Gorshkov is guilty only of oversight, of

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

culpable neglect of the state's interests. The case has been going on for years, but Gorshkov keeps running into new obstacles. "Of the dishonour heaped upon me, I am innocent," says Gorshkov, "innocent as can be! Of fraud and theft I am innocent!" But the case has cost him his reputation. He was dismissed and though not actually found guilty, was not entirely cleared. If he had been fully acquitted, that merchant would have had to pay him a handsome sum of money, his by right. I am ready to take Gorshkov's word, but the court will not. It is a tangled affair, so twisted that it will take more than a hundred years to unravel it. No sooner do they unravel one of the knots than the merchant thinks up another. I am sorry for Gorshkov and sympathise with him deeply. He has no work. No one will employ him because of his reputation. Everything that he owned has long been sold. The case drags on and in the meantime a child was born, quite at the wrong time. All this, of course, costs money. When the boy was ill, it cost money again; and when he died, still more money was needed. His wife is ill and he too has an old ailment. In short, he has suffered. He claims, however, that there may be a favourable decision in a few days, that there can be no doubt about it. I'm so sorry for him, Varenka. I tried to comfort him as well as I could. He is a lost little man, so much in need of protection; and I comforted him as well as I could. Goodbye, my darling. May Christ be with you and keep you in good health. Varenka, my own darling! Thinking of you is balm for the soul, and suffering for you, a relief.

Your true friend,

Makar Devushkin

September 9

Varvara Alexeyevna, my darling,

I am nearly out of my mind: a fearful thing has happened. My head is in a whirl and everything around me is whirling too. You will never guess what I have to tell. We have never imagined such a thing. No, it can't be

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

that I had not felt it in my heart! I even had a dream something like it the other day.

This is what happened. I'll describe it to you without any style, just as it comes to my pen. This morning I went to the office as usual, took my place at the desk and began to write. Here I must mention, my darling, that I did exactly the same yesterday when Timofei Ivanovich approached me in person and said that he had a paper to be copied immediately. "Please copy it as neatly and quickly as possible," he said, "it is to be signed by His Excellency today." I must mention, my darling, that yesterday I was not altogether myself. I felt so sad and lonely; my heart was gloomy and chill, I was so worried about you, my darling. I got down to work and copied the document accurately and well. But then, perhaps it was the devil's doing, or it was preordained from above or it was simply bound to happen that way: I missed a line. And God knows how it changed the sense, if sense there was left at all. They were late with that paper yesterday and His Excellency signed it only today. I came to the office, suspecting nothing and took my place next to Yemelyan Ivanovich. Here I must mention, my darling own, that for some time I have been especially shy and ashamed. I have been trying to look no one in the face. It has come to such a pass that even the creaking of a chair frightens me out of my wits. And today too I had drawn my head in like a turtle more dead than alive, so that Yefim Akimovich (the worst practical joker in the world) said for all to hear: "Makar Alexeyevich, just look at you!" And here he made such a funny face that they all shouted with laughter. And, of course, they went at it again. But I just shut my eyes, flattened my ears and pretended neither to hear nor to see. It is the best way to make them leave me alone. All of a sudden there was a commotion far away and then my name was mentioned—I could hardly believe it: it was me, Devushkin, whom they were calling. My heart missed several beats—I don't know why I was so frightened, more frightened than ever in my life. I was rooted to the chair and did not stir—as if it was not me they were calling. And the voices were coming nearer and nearer until they sounded just above me.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"Devushkin, Devushkin! Where is Devushkin?" I looked up and there stood Yevstafy Ivanovich saying: "His Excellency wants you at once, Makar Alexeyevich. You have made a mess of that document!" That was all, but it was enough, wasn't it? I turned cold all over and almost lost consciousness, I was really more dead than alive. I can't even say what I was thinking about at the moment. I remember only that we passed through one room, then another, and still another, into the private office. I was *in the presence*! There were His Excellency and all the others! I'm afraid I forgot even to bow. I stood there with trembling lips and shaking knees, and with good reason, my darling: firstly, I happened to glance at the mirror to the right and what I saw there was enough to derange anyone. And secondly, I had always behaved as if I did not exist, so I doubt that His Excellency knew that I existed at all. Perhaps he had heard someone mention a Devushkin in the ministry, but had never troubled to find out who it was.

"What is the meaning of this?" he began angrily. "Carelessness, that's what it is. Spoiling an urgent, important document!" His Excellency now turned to Yevstafy Ivanovich and I could hear only snatches of what he said. "Such negligence.... Extra trouble...." Several times I opened my mouth to apologise, but no sound came. I should have liked to run away, but dared not. And then came the worst, something so awful, my darling, that my pen trembles for shame! A button on my coat, curse it, a button that was hanging by a single thread suddenly broke off and bounced and skipped, jingling and rolling to the very feet of His Excellency. And this amid the general silence. So much for my apologies, for my excuses, for everything I was going to say in answer and in self-defence to His Excellency. The consequences were too horrible to describe. His Excellency turned his eyes upon me, noting the details of my figure and my dress. I remembered what I had seen in the mirror and—bent down to retrieve that button. What possessed me to do it! I snatched at it, but the thing kept rolling and spinning; and so you see, I also distinguished myself by my deftness. I felt my senses leaving me. All was lost: my reputation and

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

all, irretrievably lost! In the jumble of my mind I could somehow hear the shrieks and shouting of Faldoni and Theresa and the gossip of a thousand tongues. Finally, I caught the button, straightened up and stiffened. I should have stood perfectly still with my hands at my sides. But no: I had to fiddle with that button, push it on the broken threads as though it could stick on again. And all the time I was smiling, smiling, mind you. His Excellency turned away, then gave me another glance and said to Yevstafy Ivanovich: "What does this mean? Just look at the man! What is the matter with him?" Oh dearest, think of it: "What is the matter with him?" I had distinguished myself, had I not? And Yevstafy Ivanovich answered him: "An absolutely clean record, conduct exemplary, salary according to the rates." "Well, help him somehow," said His Excellency. "Let him have something in advance." "But he has already drawn all that is coming to him. Circumstances must have led him to do it since his conduct is excellent, his record is clean, absolutely clean. There is nothing against him." I was burning in the fires of hell, my darling. "Well, well," said His Excellency in a loud voice. "Have the paper copied again as quickly as possible. Devushkin, come here. Copy this paper without a mistake, and listen. . . ." Here His Excellency dismissed the others and we were left alone. Hurriedly drawing a wallet from his pocket, he found a hundred-ruble bank-note and pressed it into my hand. "Here . . . regard it as a loan, if you like. I'd like to do something for you." I started, my angel, I was struck dumb, hardly knowing what was happening. I would have kissed his hand, but he turned very red, the dear man, and then—I am not exaggerating one bit, Varenka—he actually took my unworthy hand in his and shook it as if I were his equal. "Sorry I cannot do more for you," he said. "Make no more mistakes. We'll share the blame for what's happened."

Now here is what I ask of you and Fedora: please pray for His Excellency every day. And if I had children I would ask them also to pray for His Excellency even more than they would for their own father. In all seriousness, I will say this too—I am in earnest, my darling—that terrible though my anguish was in the days of our worst

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

need, knowing the privations you had to suffer and tortured by my own humiliation and helplessness, in spite of all this, I swear that these hundred rubles are not as dear to me as the fact that he, His Excellency, shook my hand, the hand of a scarecrow and a drunkard. He has made a man of me again. He has restored my spirit and sweetened my life for all time. And I am strongly convinced that, sinful though I may be, my prayers for His Excellency will be answered.

Varenka, I am very agitated, I am utterly distraught. My heart is leaping from my breast and I am very weak. I am sending you forty-five rubles in bank-notes. I shall give twenty to my landlady, which will leave me thirty-five. I will take about twenty to repair my clothing and there will be fifteen for other needs. The impressions of this morning have upset me completely. I had better lie down. And yet I am composed, and my mind is at ease. Only my soul aches somehow, and deep within I can hear it trembling and stirring. I shall visit you later. Just now I am too dizzy after all these happenings. God sees all, my darling, my dearest heart!

Your friend,
Makar Devushkin

September 10

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

I am very happy to hear of your good fortune and fully appreciate the kindness of your chief. Now you may have a rest from your cares. But don't squander your money, for the love of God. Live quietly and as modestly as you can and begin to put something by, if only a little, so that misfortune will not find you unprepared. Please do not worry about us. Fedora and I will manage somehow. Why have you sent us so much money, Makar Alexeyevich? We really do not need so much—we were satisfied with what we had. It is true that we shall need money to move to another house, but Fedora hopes to collect an old debt. I shall keep twenty rubles for emergencies and I am sending you back the rest. Take care of your money, Makar Alexeyevich. Good-bye. May you rest from

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

your cares; be well and in good spirits. I would write more if I were not so tired. Yesterday I kept to my bed. I am glad that you have promised to visit me. Yes, please do.

V. D.

September 11

Varvara Alexeyevna, my own darling,

Please do not go away now that I am so happy and content. Don't listen to Fedora, dear, and I will do everything you want me to do. I will behave properly, if only out of respect for His Excellency. We shall again be writing happy letters to one another as we used to and share each other's joys and troubles, if there are any troubles. We will live in harmony and peace. Again, we shall take up literature. Everything has changed for the better in my life, Varenka. The landlady has grown friendlier, Theresa more intelligent and even Faldoni more willing. I have made up with Ratazyaev. I was so happy that I went to him myself. He is a good fellow at heart, my darling; and all the evil things people have said about him are slander, I discovered. He never intended to put us in a book. He told me so himself and read to me some of his new writings. As for calling me Lovelace, he has explained that it is not really an indecent word or a bad name, but only a word borrowed from a foreign language and meaning a shrewd fellow. Or, to put it in a more elegant and bookish way it is the same as saying: "A sharp young gentleman!" That is all. And so, it was only an innocent joke, my angel, which I misunderstood in my ignorance. I have apologised. And the weather, too, has been beautiful today. It is true that there was a drizzle and a light frost in the morning, but this has only freshened the air. I have bought a fine pair of shoes. I took a walk down Nevsky and stopped to read *The Bee.**

---

* *Severnaya Pchela* (*The Northern Bee*)—a newspaper.—*Ed.*

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Oh, I have forgotten to tell you the main thing: this morning I got into a conversation with Yemelyan Ivanovich and Aksenty Mikhailovich about His Excellency. I learnt that I was not the only one to whom he has acted so kindly. His Excellency is well known for his kind heart; blessings are sent him from different places, and many have wept for gratitude. They say that he adopted an orphan and later married her off to a man of importance, a clerk on special errands for His Excellency. It is known, too, that he once found a post for the son of a widow and that he has performed many other good deeds besides. I felt it my duty to add something to all this and told my story to the others, keeping back nothing. I just pocketed my shame; and, after all, what talk can there be of shame under such circumstances. Let His Excellency's good deeds be praised for all to hear. I spoke warmly, was carried away and, far from blushing, was even proud to have such a thing to tell. I told them everything (but said nothing of you, of course). I told them all about my landlady and Faldoni and Ratazyaev and my shoes and about Markov, in short, about everything. Some of them sniggered, in fact all of them did. Perhaps there was something funny about my figure or about my shoes. Oh yes, now I'm sure it was my shoes. They could not have meant any harm. It is simply that they are young and well off. Surely, they were not malicious. How could they laugh at the expense of His Excellency? Now, could they, Varenka?

I am still overcome, my darling. The events have confused me so. Have you enough firewood? Take care of yourself, Varenka, and don't catch cold. Ah, my own darling, your melancholy thoughts are killing me. I keep praying to God about it. Have you got woollen stockings and some warm things to wear? Be kind to an old man and tell him if there is anything you need. Just tell me. The bad times are over and the future is so bright, so radiant!

Those were sad times we had, Varenka, but they are gone for good and as the years pass we shall be sighing for them too. I remember my young days. There were times when I had not a kopek to my name, I was cold and hungry, but happy for all that. Walking down the Nevsky in the morning I'd see a pretty face, and that

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

would keep me happy all day. Those were the times! It is good to live, Varenka, especially in St. Petersburg. Yesterday I prayed to God with tears in my eyes and pleaded to be forgiven for those sins of mine during our troubles: for complaining, for liberal thoughts and my indulgence. I thought of you during my prayers with tenderness. It was you who fortified me, comforted me and gave me good advice. I shall never forget it, my own darling. Today I kissed all your letters one by one, my dear. Good-bye, dear heart. I have heard that there is a service coat for sale in a shop not far away. Perhaps I should inquire? Good-bye, my little angel, good-bye.

Your affectionate

Makar Devushkin

September 15

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

I am greatly agitated. Let me tell you what happened. I have the worst of forebodings! Judge for yourself: this is what happened. Mr. Bykov is in St. Petersburg. Fedora has met him. He was riding in a droshky, but stopped and got out when he saw Fedora, approached her and asked where she lived. When Fedora refused to tell him, he said with a little laugh that he knew who was staying with her (Anna Fyodorovna must have told him). Fedora could not contain herself and began to scold him roundly, saying that he was an immoral man and the cause of my unhappiness. To this he observed that I must be unhappy indeed since I had not a kopek. Fedora then told him that I could have earned my living by working, or married someone, or found a situation, but that thanks to him I was ill and going to die. To this he said that I was too young to die, that I was featherbrained, and that *my virtues had become somewhat tarnished too* (his exact words). Fedora and I had thought that he did not know where we lived, but then yesterday, when I had gone out to do some shopping in Gostiny Dvor, he suddenly came to our place. He seemed to have come intentionally when I was not at home. He asked Fedora many questions about me and about

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

our life, inspected everything, my needlework too, and finally asked: "Who is that clerk with whom you are acquainted?" You were just crossing the yard at the moment and Fedora pointed you out to him. He looked and only smiled again. Fedora asked him to go away, said that I was ill through my troubles, and that to see him would be most unpleasant for me. To this he made no answer, but then remarked that he had just dropped in for want of something better to do. He then offered her twenty-five rubles which she, naturally, declined. What does all this mean? Why did he come? How did he manage to find out everything about us? I am lost in conjectures. Fedora says that Aksinia, her sister-in-law, who comes to see us sometimes, knows Nastasia, the washwoman, and Nastasia's cousin is a watchman at the ministry where a friend of Anna Fyodorovna's nephew is employed. That, undoubtedly, is how Anna Fyodorovna has got wind of it. But perhaps Fedora is mistaken. We don't know what to do. Will he come again? I am terrified at the thought. When Fedora told me all this yesterday, I nearly fainted. What else could he want of me? I refuse to have anything more to do with them. Why should he pursue poor me? I am in constant fear. What if Bykov should come again this very minute? What is in store for me? Come to see me immediately, Makar Alexeyevich! Please come at once, come for God's sake.

V. D.

September 18

Varvara Alexeyevna, my dear,

On this date a grievous, unexpected and quite inexplicable happening took place in our house. Our poor Gorshkov has cleared himself completely. The decision was passed long ago and today he went to hear the final verdict. The case ended very fortunately for him. Whatever fault was his in the way of negligence has been condoned. He has been awarded a handsome sum in damages from the merchant, and so his circumstances have improved, the blot has been removed from his reputation. In short,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

everything has changed, and his best expectations have been fulfilled. He returned at three in the afternoon, pale as a ghost, his lips trembling, but smiling nonetheless. He embraced his wife and children, and we came to him in a crowd to congratulate him. Deeply moved, he bowed continuously and shook hands several times with each of us. He seemed to have grown taller somehow, his back was straighter, and his eyes had stopped running. How excited he was, the poor man! He could not stand still for a minute, he kept picking things up and putting them down, smiling and bowing, sitting down and getting up, saying anything that came to his mind, speaking of his honour, his good name and his children. He even wept. Most of us, too, had tears in our eyes. Probably intending to encourage him, Ratazyaev said: "What good is honour, my friend, when there is nothing to eat. The main thing is money, it's the money you should be thankful for," and he patted him on the shoulder. It seemed to me that Gorshkov was offended by this. Not that he expressed his displeasure directly, but he gave Ratazyaev a strange look and removed the hand from his shoulder. He would never have done such a thing before. People differ of course. I, for instance, would not have been so proud on such a joyous day. There are occasions when one bows an extra time and even humiliates oneself for no other cause than excess of benevolent feeling overflowing one's soft heart. But why talk about myself? "Yes," Gorshkov said, "the money is a good thing too. God be thanked for it!" Again and again he kept saying: "God be thanked for it!" His wife ordered a better and more abundant dinner and the landlady herself did the cooking. Our landlady is a kind woman in her own way. Waiting for dinner, Gorshkov was very restless and visited all the rooms, whether invited or not. He would just enter, smile, take a seat, say something or perhaps nothing at all and then get up and go away. In the naval officer's room he was asked to make a fourth, and even played a hand, or two. He made some silly mistakes and three or four absurd leads, and gave up. "I just thought I'd play a game or two," he said, and left the room. Meeting me in the passage, he took me by both hands, looked me straight in the eye, but in a very

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

queer way, then pressed my hands once more and went off, still smiling, but again in a queer way, a forced, somewhat lifeless smile. His wife was weeping for joy bustling happily in their room as though it was a great holiday. After dinner he said to his wife: "I think I'll rest a little." He lay down on the bed, called his little daughter and stroked her head again and again. Then he turned to his wife and asked: "Where is our Petenka?" His wife at once crossed herself and reminded him that Petenka was dead. "Oh, yes, I know," he agreed. "Petenka is in heaven." She saw that he was not himself, that he was shaken and overcome, and urged him to go to sleep. "I'll do that . . . I'll sleep a little." Then he turned away, lay still for a while and turned his head again as though to speak. She did not understand and asked him what he had said, but he did not answer. Believing him asleep she went to see the landlady and stayed for an hour. When she returned she found him still asleep and sat down to do some sewing. For the next half-hour she was so engrossed in her work and her thoughts, that she forgot all about him. But something made her start up with fear, and the first thing that struck her was the dead silence. She looked at the bed and saw that he had not changed his position. She came up to him, pulled back the covers, and knew at a glance that he was dead—he had died, poor Gorshkov, as if struck by lightning; and nobody knows why. I am confounded and have not come to myself yet. How can a man die like that? The poor fellow, this Gorshkov. What a life he had, what a life! His wife is weeping, and so frightened, and his little girl is huddling in some corner. Such a commotion then arose. There is to be a postmortem, so I have heard. I am sorrier than I can say; which of us can foretell the hour?. . . Here today and gone tomorrow!

Yours,

Makar Devushkin

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

September 19

My dearest Varvara Alexeyevna,

I hasten to inform you that Ratazyaev has found some work for me with a writer. He came to Ratazyaev with a very thick manuscript—plenty of work, thank God. Unfortunately, his handwriting is so illegible that I don't know how to go about it. It has to be done quickly and it is written in such a queer way that one cannot make out the meaning. We have agreed to the price of forty kopeks a sheet. I am writing this to let you know that I shall have some additional money. Good-bye, my darling, I must get down to work now.

Your constant friend,

Makar Devushkin

September 23

Makar Alexeyevich, my dear friend,

I have not written to you these three days and in the meantime I have had much trouble and worry.

The day before yesterday Bykov came to see me. Fedora had gone out somewhere and I was alone. When I opened the door at his knock I was so frightened that I could hardly move. I must have turned very pale. He entered with his usual loud laugh, took a chair and sat down. Finally I regained my composure and sat down to work in the corner. His smile soon faded as he took a closer look at me. I have grown so thin of late. My cheeks and eyes are sunken and I must have been as white as a sheet. Indeed, people who knew me a year ago would hardly recognise me now. For a time he sat there, looking fixedly at me, and then grew merry again. He said something. Just what I answered I cannot remember, and he laughed again. He was here for a whole hour, talking and asking questions. When he got up to leave, he took me by the hand and said (to quote his exact words): "Between you and me, Varvara Alexeyevna, this Anna Fyodorovna, your relative and my close acquaintance, is a vile creature." To

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

this he added a grosser word. "She has led your cousin Sasha astray and ruined you as well. As for me, I have behaved like a scoundrel, of course. It's a common failing with men," and he laughed at the top of his voice. Then he observed that he was not much of a speaker, but that he had said the main thing, the thing that his sense of honour had compelled him to say, and now he intended to put the rest very briefly. Then and there he told me that he wanted to marry me, that he regarded it his duty to restore my honour, that he was wealthy and that after our wedding he would take me to his estate in the steppes where he intended to hunt hares; he would not come to St. Petersburg any more because it was a nasty town; he had a worthless nephew in the city whom he had sworn to disinherit and that this was, in fact, the reason for his proposal: he wanted a direct heir. Then remarking that I lived very poorly, and small wonder that I looked ill, living in such a hole, he presaged certain death for me if I stayed here another month. Lodgings in St. Petersburg were horrid, he added, and asked if there was anything that I needed.

I was so amazed by his proposal that I began to cry, I don't know why. Mistaking my tears for an expression of gratitude, he declared that he had always been sure that I was a good, warm-hearted and learned girl, and yet he had hesitated to take this step until he had made the proper inquiries about me. He then asked a few questions about you and added that he had heard that you were a man of honourable principles and that he, for his part, did not wish to be indebted to you, and would five hundred rubles be enough for everything that you had done for me? When I explained that mere money could never repay you for what you had done, he retorted that it was all nonsense: sheer novels, he called it, and added that I was still too young and probably fond of reading verses, that novels and verses were always the ruin of young girls, that books in general corrupted the morals and he detested them. "Live to my age," he said, "and then you'll be a better judge of people." He urged me to give careful consideration to his proposal because it would be unfortunate if I took such a step rashly. Rashness and thought-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

lessness had always been the undoing of the young. Of course, he was anxious to have a favourable answer. Otherwise he would be compelled to marry a merchant's daughter in Moscow because he had sworn to disinherit that rascally nephew of his. Ignoring my protests, he left five hundred rubles on my embroidery frame, to buy some sweets, as he put it. In the country, he said, I would grow as round as a bun and live in clover. He was fearfully busy at present, and had been running about all day only dropping in to see me for a minute. And then he took his leave. My dear friend, I have thought long about all this and suffered much, but at last I have made up my mind. I am going to marry the man. I must agree to his proposal. If anyone can rid me of dishonour, restore my good name, and avert poverty, hardships and misfortunes, he is the man. What else can I expect of the future; what more can I ask from destiny? Fedora says that one should not miss one's happiness and that if this is not happiness, then what is? As for myself, I can see no other way, my friend. I've been working so hard that I've ruined my health, and I cannot work all the time. To be a governess or a servant? I would waste away from loneliness and would not suit anyone besides. I am sickly by nature and will always be a burden to someone. I realise that it is no paradise that I am going to, but what shall I do? Just tell me, what shall I do? What choice have I?

I am not really asking for advice. I wanted to think it out alone. The decision you have read is unalterable and I shall announce it to Bykov, who is pressing me. He said that his affairs could not wait and that he could not postpone the wedding because of my fancies. God knows whether or not I shall be happy, but I shall entrust my fate to His inscrutable will. They say that Bykov is a kind man. He will respect me and perhaps I will learn to respect him too. What more can I expect of such a marriage?

I have told you all there is to say, Makar Alexeyevich, and am sure that you will understand. Do not try to dissuade me. You will not succeed! Weigh in your heart, for a moment, all that has led me to take this step. I was frightened at first but now I am calmer. What awaits me,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

I do not know. The future is obscure. Come what may. His will be done!

Bykov has just arrived and I shall have to leave this letter unfinished, though I have much more to say.

V. D.

September 23

Varvara Alexeyevna, my dearest,

I hurry to answer your letter, dear, and announce that I am perfectly amazed. There is something wrong somewhere. Yesterday, we buried Gorshkov. Yes, Bykov has acted nobly, of course. But have you really agreed, my darling? All is in God's hands, of course. That is undoubtedly true; and this too must be in God's hands; and the ways of our Maker are blessed though inscrutable, as are the ways of fate! No question about it! Fedora also approves of it. Now you will be happy, of course, living in content, my darling little dove, my little beautiful angel—but why so soon, Varenka? Ah yes, there are Mr. Bykov's affairs. Everyone has his affairs, of course; so he, too, may have business to attend to.... I saw him leaving the house. He is an imposing man, more than imposing. But there is something wrong somewhere. The point is not that he is imposing, but that I am quite upset. How in the world shall we write letters to each other now? And how shall I live alone? I am weighing all your reasons in my heart, as you asked me to. I'm just sitting here all the time and weighing. I was already copying the twentieth page of that manuscript when your letter came. You are leaving, my darling, and must buy all kinds of things: frocks and shoes and all that. As it happens, there is a shop I know on Gorokhovaya. I have told you about it before, remember? But how can you leave now? You cannot go now. It is impossible, absolutely impossible! There are so many things to buy, and a carriage too! And the weather is bad; see how it is raining, coming down in buckets. And such a wet rain, too! And besides.... You will be cold, my angel. Your heart will feel cold. Are you not afraid to go

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

off with a stranger? And what will be left for me? Fedora says you are very lucky, but she is a rowdy wench and thinks only of ruining me. Will you be going to Vespers? I would go there to have a look at you. It is true, my darling, very true that you are a learned, virtuous and warm-hearted girl. But he would do better to marry the merchant's daughter. Don't you think so, dear? Wouldn't he do better to marry the merchant's daughter? I'll drop in for an hour after dark. It gets dark early now and I'll be sure to come. As soon as dusk falls I'll be sure to come. You are expecting Bykov now, and when he leaves I'll come. Wait for me, dear heart, I will drop in.

Makar Devushkin

September 27

My dear friend, Makar Alexeyevich,

Mr. Bykov says that I must have three dozen chemises of Dutch linen. I shall have to find a seamstress who can make two dozen, and there is so little time. Mr. Bykov is irritated, he says that these fripperies are too troublesome. Our wedding is to take place in five days; and on the day after we are to leave. Mr. Bykov is in a hurry and thinks it a shame to waste so much time. I have been running about so much that I scarcely have the strength to stand. There is so much to do and, honestly, it would be better if there was none of this. And another thing: we have not enough *blonde* or lace, some more has to be bought, because Mr. Bykov says that he does not want his wife to look like a scullery maid and that I must put the noses of the local ladies out of joint, as he puts it. Could you go to Madame Chiffon in Gorokhovaya and ask her to send some seamstresses and to be kind enough to come herself. I am not well today. Our new apartment is cold and there is no order. Mr. Bykov's aunt is so old and ill that I am afraid she may die before our departure, but Mr. Bykov says that it is nothing, that she will come round. Everything is in such disorder. Mr. Bykov does not live here and the servants keep running off, God knows where. Sometimes there is only Fedora to do the work.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Mr. Bykov's valet who is generally in charge has been gone for three days. Mr. Bykov comes here every morning and is always angry. Yesterday he thrashed the steward which led to trouble with the police. There has been no one to bring you my letters, and I will post this one. Oh, I have almost forgotten the most important thing. Tell Madame Chiffon that she should alter the *blonde* according to yesterday's sample. Perhaps she could come herself and show me the new patterns. Tell her, too, that I have changed my mind about the *canezou*: it should be done in *crochet*. And the monograms on the handkerchiefs should be in tambour and not satin stitch. The word is tambour. Will you remember? I have almost forgotten another thing: please, tell her that the lappets on the fur cloak must be raised and that the gussets should be braided and the collar fringed with lace or broad falbala. You won't forget, will you?

Yours,

V. D.

P. S. I'm ashamed to trouble you with my errands. The day before yesterday, too, you were running about all morning. But I can't help it, really! There is not even a semblance of order here and I am ill. So do not be angry with me, Makar Alexeyevich. I am so depressed. What is to become of me, my dear, my kind Makar Alexeyevich? I am afraid to look into the future. I am troubled by forebodings and am living in a haze.

P.P.S. Please do not forget what I have asked you. I am afraid that you may make a mistake. Do not forget: in tambour and not satin stitch.

V. D.

September 27

My dear Varvara Alexeyevna,

I have carefully carried out all your instructions. Madame Chiffon told me that she herself had meant to do it in tambour stitch which is more suitable or something—I didn't quite understand. She said something about falba-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

la, but I have forgotten what. All I can remember is that she spoke a good deal about falbala; she's a maddening old hag! What else did she say? She had better tell you herself. I am half-dead with running about and have not been to the office today. But don't worry on my account, darling. I'm prepared to run to every shop in the city for your peace of mind. You say that you are afraid to look into the future, but then you will know everything at seven o'clock. Madame Chiffon has promised to come. Don't be downhearted, my darling. Perhaps everything is for the best. I can't get that cursed falbala out of my mind. Oh that falbala—falbala! I would come to see you, my darling, I certainly would. I have in fact passed the gates of your house twice, but Bykov, that is, Mr. Bykov is always so angry that I really... Well, there it is!

Makar Devushkin

September 28

My dear Makar Alexeyevich,

Please, please, run to the jeweller's immediately and tell him that he needn't make the pearl and emerald earrings. Mr. Bykov says the price is more than he is prepared to pay. He is rather annoyed and says that all this has cost him plenty already and that he is being robbed. Yesterday, too, he said that if he had anticipated such expenses he would have never started the whole thing. He said that we shall go away immediately after the wedding ceremony, that there will be no guests and that I should not expect to be dancing about and flirting, since there is no cause for celebration yet. That is the way he talks. God knows that I don't care at all for these things and that Mr. Bykov himself has ordered them. I dare not answer him because he is too easily irritated. What is to become of me?

V. D.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

September 28

Varvara Alexeyevna, my darling child,

I.... That is, all is well as regards the jeweller. As for myself, I first meant to say that I am ill and in bed. I had to fall ill just when there are so many things to do, cursed luck! To complete my misery, His Excellency was very angry the other day and he shouted at Yemelyan Ivanovich until his breath gave out, poor man. That is what I wished to tell you. I would like to write more, but am afraid to cause you unnecessary trouble. I am a plain, not very clever man, and write whatever comes to my mind; so that you may find that some of the things I scribble are not quite as they should be. Well, it doesn't matter really.

Yours,

Makar Devushkin

September 29

Varvara Alexeyevna, dear heart,

I met Fedora today, my darling, and she said that you would be wed tomorrow and will leave the day after tomorrow and that Mr. Bykov has already hired the horses. I have already told you that piece of news about His Excellency. What else? Ah yes, I have looked over those bills sent by that shop in Gorokhovaya. Everything is correct but very expensive. Why is Mr. Bykov angry with you? Well, may you be happy for ever after, my darling. I will be so glad to know that you are happy. I would attend the ceremony if not for the pain in my back.

To mention the letters again.... Who will carry them? You have treated Fedora handsomely. You are very kind. And for this God will bless you. Good deeds never go unrewarded, and virtue never fails to win the halo of divine justice. My darling, my only one, I should like to write to you every hour, every minute and just write and write and write. I have your book, *The Tales of Ivan Belkin*. Please, leave it with me, my dear. It is not that I want to read it so much. But as you know, winter is near

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

and the evenings will be long and sad, and that will be the time for reading. I will move from my room into your old one which I will rent from Fedora. I will never part with that honest woman. She is so industrious, you know! Yesterday I visited your deserted room, walked about and looked at things. And there, in the corner, stood your dear embroidery frame with even a piece of work in it that you had been doing. I examined it and saw some other odds and ends. I was so happy to see that you had used one of my letters as a spool to wind your silk. On the table too I found a scrap of paper with the words: "My dear Makar Alexeyevich, I hasten to. . . ." Someone must have interrupted you just then. And in the corner behind the screen stood your little bed. My poor, dear little dove! Well, good-bye, good-bye, my dear. Please answer soon, I implore you.

Makar Devushkin

September 30

Makar Alexeyevich, my constant and truest friend,

The thing is done, the die is cast. What awaits me I do not know, but will submit to His will. Tomorrow we leave and I am writing these lines in farewell, my closest friend, my protector, my heart. Don't grieve for me. Be happy, remember me and may God be with you always. I will remember you and always mention you in my prayers. And so ends the life that I have led here. Most of what I shall remember will give me little comfort in the future, but my memory of you will be all the dearer. You are my only friend, the only person who loved me. I saw and knew that you loved me. Just a smile or a line from me was enough to make you happy. Now you shall have to do without me. How lonely you will be! Who will there be to comfort you? My kind and only friend! I shall leave you the book and the embroidery frame and the letter that I once began. Read the first lines again and imagine what pleases you for the rest. God knows what I would have written! Remember your poor Varenka who loved

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

you so well. I have left all your letters in the top drawer of Fedora's dresser. You write that you are ill, but Mr. Bykov would not let me go out today. I shall write to you, of course, but God knows what may happen and so we had better say good-bye, my dear, my dear friend. I would love to embrace you. Good-bye, my friend, good-bye. Be well and happy always! I will pray for you. My heart is heavier than I can say. Mr. Bykov is calling.

Your ever loving,

V.

P. S. My soul is so full, so full of tears. The tears are suffocating me. Good-bye! Oh, how sad it is. Remember your poor Varenka!

*

Varenka, my dear, my dove, my precious!

You are being carried off from me. You are going! I would rather they had torn the heart out of my breast! How could you let them? You are weeping and yet going. Your letter still wet with tears has just reached me. And so you do not really want to go; and so they are making you. . . . And so you are sorry for me. . . . And so you love me. Who will take care of you now? Your little heart will be so sad and cold. Grief will drain it of blood, sadness will break it, you'll die there alone and they will bury you in the cold earth with no one to weep over the grave. Mr. Bykov will be busy hunting hares. Ah, my darling, how could you have taken such a step? What have you done! What violence have you done to yourself! They will drive you to the grave, they'll starve your spirit to death. You are only a little feather, my little angel. And what was I about? What was I doing? I saw that the child was beside herself, that the child was ill. I should have put my foot down—but no! I behaved like a fool, thought of nothing and saw nothing as though it were no concern of mine. Good God! I was running about after falbala. No Varenka, I shall rise from my bed. I shall recover tomorrow and rise from my bed. I shall throw myself

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

under the wheels of your carriage. I shall not let you go! It's an outrage! What right have they! I will go with you—I'll run behind your carriage if you won't take me. I'll run until I fall! Where are you going? Do you know? I shall tell you! You are going to the steppes, to the steppes as bare as the palm of my hand. There's no one there except unfeeling peasant wives and their rude, drunken men. Even the trees have shed their leaves there, and it is rainy and cold. That is where you are going! Mr. Bykov will be busy with his hares, and you? Do you want to be a landowner's wife, my darling? Just look at yourself, my little cherub. Are you at all like a landowner's wife? It's out of the question, Varenka! To whom shall I write my letters then? Just stop to think for a moment! To whom shall I write? Whom shall I call "dear heart" then? Whom shall I call by that sweet name? Where will I find you, my little angel? I will die, Varenka, I will surely die, my heart will not bear this misfortune. I loved you as the very light of God, as my own daughter. I loved everything in you, my darling, I have lived for you alone. I have worked and copied my papers and walked and set down my observations in loving letters only because you were near. Perhaps you have never realised this, but it has been so. Now listen again: how can it be that you are going away? You can't! It's quite impossible. Altogether out of the question! It is raining and you are sure to catch cold—you are so weak, so frail. And the carriage roof is sure to leak. The carriage will break down; it will surely break down the moment you are out of town. They make rotten carriages here in Petersburg. I know those carriage-makers, they are only concerned with the fashion, a pretty toy they want to make, but they cannot build solidly; they cannot, I swear! I will throw myself on my knees before Mr. Bykov, my darling. I will prove it to him, prove it to them all. And you, my sweet dear, reason with him too. Tell him that you must stay here and cannot go. Oh why didn't he marry that merchant's daughter in Moscow! It would have been so much better if he had. The merchant's daughter is more suitable. By far more suitable! I'm sure of it. And then you could stay here, with me! And why do you need Mr. Bykov? How has he en-

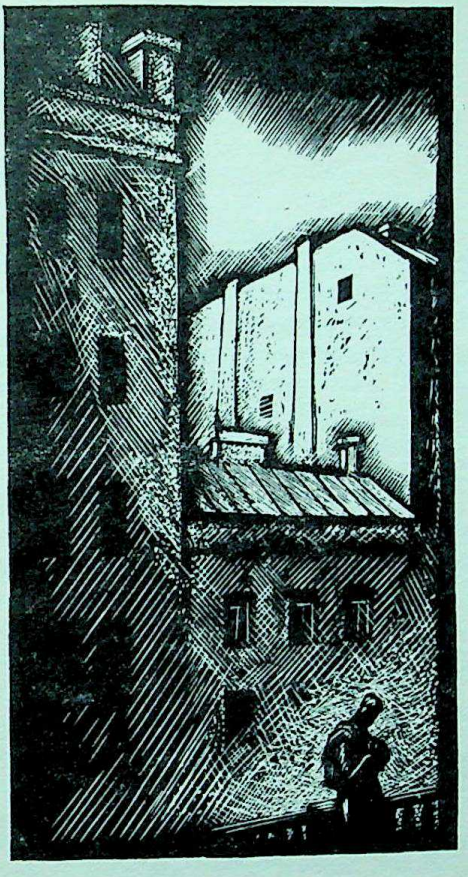
CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

deared himself to you? Surely not because of falbala! What is falbala anyway? Why even mention falbala? It is nonsense, my darling. Here it is a matter of life and death and not of falbala! Falbala is only a piece of cloth; falbala is only a worthless rag. Just wait until I receive my salary and I'll buy you all the falbala you want, my darling. In that shop, you remember? Just wait until I receive my salary, my sweetest cherub! Oh Varenka, good God! Are you definitely going away with Mr. Bykov? For ever? Oh Varenka! No, you must write again, just one letter more! And then again from there. If you don't, then the letter that I have now will be the last; and surely it cannot be the last. How could it be? All of a sudden—the last letter! I'll be writing to you just the same. And you write to me too. My style is just taking shape now.... Oh, my dear, bother style! I hardly know what I am saying and what I am writing about, and it doesn't matter as long as I keep on writing and writing.... My little dove, my dearest, my own!

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu



WHITE NIGHTS

A Sentimental Love Story

(From a Dreamer's Reminiscences)

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

. . .Or was he born that he might dwell,
If only for a fleeting hour,
In the reflection of your love?

I. TURGENEV

FIRST NIGHT

It was a beautiful night, a night that we may only know when we are very young, dear reader. The sky was so starry, so clear was the sky, that, looking at it, you could not help asking yourself: how can all sorts of cross and crotchety people live beneath a sky like this? That's a very youthful question, too, kind reader, very youthful indeed, but may it please the Lord to trouble your heart with such questions more often. Speaking of all sorts of cross and crotchety people, I cannot but recall my own exemplary behaviour all that day. Ever since the morning, I was prey to a peculiar melancholy. I suddenly fancied that everyone was forsaking me in my loneliness, that everyone was casting me off. It would only be fair to ask, of course: who was everyone? For I have been living in St. Petersburg for eight years and I have not managed to make any friends to speak of. But why should I make any friends? As it is, I am friends with the whole of St. Petersburg, and that was why, when all the town suddenly packed up and left for the country, I fancied that everyone was forsaking me. It frightened me to be left alone, and for three whole days I wandered up and down the streets in deep dejection, quite unable to understand what was the matter with me. I'd go to Nevsky Prospekt or to the park, or I'd ramble along the embankment, and wherever I went I missed seeing the people I was used to meeting at the same place and at the same hour for a whole year now. Of course, they don't know me, but I know them. I know them well, I have made a study of their faces; I delight in them when they are gay, and grow melancholy when they are clouded. I almost made friends with one old man I had been encountering on the Fontanka every single day at the same hour. He had such a grave and pensive face; he kept

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

whispering to himself, gesticulating with his left hand, while in his right he carried a long knotty walking-stick with a golden knob. He had noticed me, too, and took a sincere interest in me. I am sure he would have felt dispirited if he had failed to meet me at the same spot on the Fontanka at the same hour. This is why we almost greeted one another at times, especially when we were both in a happy frame of mind. The other day when we met after an interval of two whole days, we were actually on the point of raising our hats but, fortunately, we pulled ourselves up in time, dropped our hands, and passed each other by with unspoken sympathy in our hearts.

I am friends with the houses too. When I walk down the street they all seem to step forward before me, and they almost speak, staring at me with all their windows: "How are you? I am very well too, another storey will be added to me in May!" or "How are you? I'm to go into repair tomorrow", or "I almost caught fire, and I was so frightened!" and so on. I have my favourites among them and my intimate friends. One of them intends to take a course of treatment at the architect's this summer. I shall make a point of coming here every day to see that it doesn't come to any harm, bless it. But I shall never forget what happened to one very pretty, pale pink little house. It was such a sweet little house, it smiled at me in such a friendly way and looked so haughtily at its clumsy neighbours that my heart rejoiced whenever I chanced to walk past it. And then, last week, as I was going down the street I heard a piteous cry: "They're painting me yellow!" I glanced at my friend. The brutes! The barbarians! They had spared nothing: neither the pillars nor the cornices, and my friend had turned yellow like a canary. I almost had an attack of jaundice over it, and to this day I cannot bring myself to go and see my poor, disfigured friend, painted the colour of the Celestial Empire.

And so you see, dear reader, that I am friends with the whole of St. Petersburg.

I have already said that I was feeling depressed, and the mood persisted for three full days before I understood the cause of it. I felt ill at ease out-of-doors (that one was not there, this one was not to be seen, and what could

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

have happened to so and so?), and at home I felt restless too. I cudgelled my brains for two nights in succession: what was amiss in my flat? Why was I finding it so uninviting? And, seeking an answer, I looked about me at the green grimy walls, the ceiling hung with cobwebs, which Matryona allowed to gather so luxuriantly, I examined all the furniture I had, peering at every chair, thinking that here lay the root of the trouble perhaps, for if I see a single chair standing differently from where it had stood the day before, I grow restless; I looked at the window, but my mind was not relieved! It even occurred to me to summon Matryona and give her a fatherly scolding about the cobwebs and the untidiness generally, but she only looked at me in surprise, and left the room without a word, and so the cobwebs remain undisturbed to this day. And finally, only this morning, I understood what was the matter. Why, they were bolting from me into the country! Forgive me this vulgar expression, but I was beyond the choice of lofty words . . . because everyone who lived in St. Petersburg was either going or had gone to the country; because in every respectable-looking gentleman hiring a carriage I instantly saw a sedate family man who, having finished with his daily work, was hurrying off to the country to join his family; because every man in the street had quite a peculiar look now, which all but said to every passer-by: "We are only here in passing, gentlemen, and in a couple of hours we shall be leaving town." If I saw a window pushed open—slim sugar-white fingers drumming on the pane first, and then a pretty girl thrusting out her head and calling a vendor of potted flowers—I instantly, there and then, imagined that those flowers were being bought not at all because the people wanted to enjoy the spring and the flowers in a stuffy flat in town, but because very soon they would all be moving to the country and would be taking the flowers along. Moreover, I had already made such strides in my new and peculiar field of observation that I could tell unerringly, by outward appearances alone, where each one had his summer residence.

Those who came from the Kamenny and Aptekarsky Islands, or from down Peterhof way, could be identified by their studied gracefulness of manner, their fashionable

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

summer clothes and the splendid carriages which brought them to town. Those from Pargolovo and places further away instantly impressed one with their prudence and their dignity; while an unruffled and gay look stamped the summer resident of the Krestovsky Island.

Whether I happened to meet a long procession of coachmen walking lazily, reins in hand, beside their dray-carts piled high with furniture of every description: tables, chairs, divans, Turkish and otherwise, and other household possessions, with a skinny cook perched on the very top of the load, presiding over all this and guarding her master's belongings zealously; or whether I watched the boats, laden with furniture and utensils, gliding down the Neva or the Fontanka towards the Chornaya River or the islands—the carts and the boats increased tenfold, a hundredfold in my eyes. It seemed to me that everything had started up and taken to the road, everything was moving to the country in whole caravans, it seemed that St. Petersburg itself was threatened with becoming a desert. And then I felt ashamed, hurt and sad: there was absolutely no reason and no place for me to go to in the country. I was prepared to go with every cart, with every respectable-looking gentleman hiring a carriage; but no one, no one at all invited me; it was as if I were forgotten, as if I were indeed a stranger to them!

I walked so long and so far that I quite lost my bearings, which was a usual thing with me, when suddenly I found myself at the town gate. All at once I felt gay, I passed the barrier and walked through the green fields and meadows feeling no weariness and only aware, with the whole of my being, that a weight was lifting from my heart. All those who drove past me threw such friendly glances at me, they all but greeted me, they all seemed so happy about something, and every one of them was smoking a cigar. And I, too, felt happy as never before. It was as though I had suddenly found myself in Italy, so strong was my impact with Nature, half-sick townsman that I was, who had almost suffocated in the walled-in streets.

There is something ineffably touching in the country around St. Petersburg when, with the coming of spring, Nature suddenly displays all its might, all the strength

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

which the heavens have endowed it with; when it dons its finery, decks itself out with bright flowers.... For some reason it reminds me of a sickly, consumptive young girl whom you regard with pity at times, with a compassionate sort of affection at others, and ignore altogether at others still, but who suddenly, for a single moment, turns strangely and wondrously beautiful and you, stunned and entranced, have to ask yourself: what force has made those sad, pensive eyes flash with such fire? What brought the colour to those pale, wan cheeks? What breathed passion into those delicate features? Why does her bosom heave so? What has so suddenly brought strength, life, and beauty into the face of this poor girl, making it glow with a smile so radiant and light up with laughter so sparkling? You look about you, you wonder, and then you begin to understand.... But the moment is gone, and perhaps on the morrow you will again meet the same pensive and listless look, the same wan face, the same attitude of meekness and timidity, and even see remorse, or even traces of morbid regret and vexation because of that one moment of inspiration.... And you feel sorry that the ephemeral flower of beauty has wilted so quickly, so irrevocably, that the flash has been so deceptive and in vain, you feel sorry because you have not even had the time to come to love it....

But still, my night was better than my day! This is what happened.

It was very late when I got back to town, the clock had already struck ten when I was nearing my home. My route lay along the embankment of the canal, where you would hardly meet a soul at this hour of the night. It's true, of course, that I had my lodgings in the most remote part of the city. I walked and sang, for when I am happy I invariably hum a tune, like every happy man who has neither friends nor acquaintances to share his happiness with. And suddenly, I had a most unexpected adventure.

A woman was standing close to the railing a little distance away from me; she seemed to be staring absorbedly at the murky canal waters as she leaned against the grille. She was wearing a pretty yellow bonnet and a dainty little

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

black cape. "She's a young girl and she is sure to be a brunette," I thought. Apparently she did not hear my footsteps, she never stirred as I walked past her with bated breath and loudly beating heart. "That's odd," thought I. "She must be deep in thought about something." And suddenly I froze to a standstill. I thought I heard muffled sobs. Yes, I was right. The girl was crying, and she sobbed again and again. Good Lord! My heart contracted. And shy though I am of women, this was an exceptional moment.... I turned back, took a step towards her and would have certainly cried "Madam!" had I not been aware that this exclamation had already been uttered thousands of times in all the Russian novels of the *beau monde*. That stopped me. But whilst I searched my mind for a suitable opening, the girl recovered her senses, looked about her, pulled herself together, dropped her eyes, and slipped past me along the embankment. I followed her at once, but she crossed the street when she heard me, and walked along the pavement on the other side. I did not venture to cross the street. My heart fluttered like a captured bird's. And then mere chance came to my aid.

Suddenly I saw a gentleman in evening clothes, dignified in years but not in deportment, appear on the pavement close to the girl. He swayed as he walked, steadying himself by clutching at the wall. The girl hurried on, as fleet and light as an arrow, the way all young girls walk when they do not want an offer of an escort home at night. The swaying gentleman would never have caught up with her of course, had not the destiny that ruled my fate prompted him to resort to extreme measures. Suddenly, without a word, the gentleman sprang forward and tore off after the girl. She was swift as the wind, but the swaying gentleman was gaining on her, then he caught up with her, the girl cried out, and ... I bless my stars for the splendid knotty stick I happened to be carrying in my right hand. In a flash I was on the other side of the street, in a flash the importunate gentleman realised what was afoot, resigned himself to the irresistible argument of the stick, fell back without a word, and only when we were very far away broke into protest against me in rather forceful terms. But his words hardly carried.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"Give me your hand," I said to the young lady, "and he will not dare accost us again."

Silently she gave me her hand, which still trembled from fright and agitation. Oh, unknown gentleman! How I blessed you just then! I gave her a fleeting look: she was very sweet and a brunette—so I had surmised correctly! Her black eyelashes were still glistening with tears of recent fright—or was it recent sorrow—I know not. But a radiant smile already touched her lips. She stole a glance at me too, blushed faintly, and dropped her eyes.

"Now you see, you shouldn't have shunned me earlier. Had I been there, nothing would have happened."

"But I did not know you, I thought you, too. . . ."

"And do you know me now?"

"A little. Now tell me, to begin with, why are you trembling?"

"Oh you have guessed it! You have guessed at once who you are dealing with!" I replied, delighted to find my young lady so clever: not a bad thing to go with beauty. "It is true that I am shy of women, I admit that I am agitated as much as you were a minute ago when that gentleman frightened you. . . . I feel somewhat frightened now. It's like a dream, and even in my dreams I never imagined that some day I would speak to a woman."

"No? Really?"

"Yes. If my hand trembles now it is because it has never yet been clasped by a hand as pretty and small as yours. I have become quite unused to women, or rather I have never been used to them. I'm quite alone, you know. I don't even know how to talk to them. At this very moment, too, I may have said something silly to you, have I? Tell me frankly, I assure you I shall not mind. . . ."

"Oh no, no, on the contrary. But if you insist on my being frank with you, I shall tell you that shyness appeals to women; and if you wish to know more, then I'll tell you: it appeals to me too, and I shall not send you away until we reach my house."

"You'll make me lose all my shyness instantly," I began, breathless with happiness. "And then—adieu to the only means that I possess!"

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"Means? What means? Now that wasn't very nice of you."

"Forgive me, I won't say it again, it was just a slip of the tongue, but do you think it possible that at a moment like this I should have no wish to. . . ."

"To be liked?"

"Well, yes. Be kind to me, for heaven's sake, be kind. Think what I am! Here I am, twenty-six years old, and I have never known anybody yet! So how could I speak well, cleverly and smoothly? You'll like it better too, if everything is put openly, frankly. . . . I cannot remain mute when my heart is clamouring within me. Oh well, never mind. Can you believe it, not one woman, never, never! Not a friend! All I do is dream that some day somewhere I shall meet someone. Ah, if you only knew how often I have been in love like that!"

"But how? With whom?"

"Oh, no one, just an ideal, with anyone I saw in my dreams. I make up whole romances in my dreams. Oh you do not know me! Of course, I have met two or three women, but what women were they? They were such housewives. . . . But I'll tell you something that will make you laugh. I have often thought of starting a casual conversation in the street with some lady of the aristocracy, if she were by herself, that is. I would speak to her timidly of course, with respect and feeling. I'd say that I was dying from loneliness, I'd beg her not to drive me away, I'd tell her that I had no means of becoming acquainted with any woman at all, I'd make her see that it was part of her calling as a woman to hear out the timid plea of a man as unhappy as I was. And that, after all, the only thing I was asking of her was to say two words of sisterly compassion to me, not to send me away at once, but to take me at my word, to listen to what I had to say, to laugh at me if it pleased her, but to give me some hope, speak a few words to me, just a few words, even if we were never to meet again! But I see you are smiling. . . . However, that's what I'm telling you all this for. . . ."

"Don't be upset, I am only smiling because it's your own fault if you're lonely, and because if you tried it, you would perhaps succeed, even if it did happen in the street;

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

the simpler the better.... No woman with a kind heart, unless, of course, she was stupid or particularly angry at something just then, would dare send you away without speaking the few words which you so timidly entreated her to speak.... Oh but what am I saying! Of course she'd take you for a madman! I was judging by myself. Little do I know of the ways of people in this world!"

"Oh thank you!" I cried. "You cannot know what you have done for me!"

"Come, come! But tell me, how did you know I was the sort of woman who ... well, whom you considered worthy of your attention and friendship ... in short, not a housewife, as you put it. Why did you venture to come up to me?"

"Why? But you were alone, that gentleman was too bold, it's night; you will admit that it is one's duty...."

"No, no, before that, there on the other side of the street. You did want to come up to me then, didn't you?"

"There, on the other side? But I really don't know how to put it, I'm afraid ... d'you know, I was feeling happy today, I walked and sang. I'd been out of town, I had never known such happy moments before. You ... but I may have just fancied it.... Forgive me if I bring it back to you: I fancied you were crying, and I ... and I could not bear it ... it wrung my heart.... O dear God! Surely I may be allowed to grieve for you! Surely it was not really sinful of me to feel a brotherly compassion for you? Forgive me, I said compassion.... Well, in a word, could I have offended you with my impulsive wish to come up to you?"

"Enough, say no more, enough," she said, pressing my hand. "It's my own fault, I brought it up myself. But I am glad I was not mistaken in you.... Well, here we are, I must turn into this alley, it's only a step or two. Good-bye and thank you."

"Can it, can it really mean that we shall never meet again? Is this all there is to be?"

"Now you see," the girl laughed, "all you wanted at first was a few words, and now.... However, I shall not say anything. Perhaps we shall meet again."

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"I'll be here tomorrow," I said. "Oh, forgive me, I am being persistent already."

"Yes, you are impatient, you are almost too persistent."

"Pray listen, listen," I broke in. "Forgive me if I say something to you again that is not . . . but this is how it is with me: I must come here tomorrow. I am a dreamer. I have so little actual life, moments like this come to me so rarely that I cannot help living them over and over again in my dreams. I shall dream of you the whole night through, I shall be dreaming of you for a whole week, a whole year. I shall certainly come here tomorrow, to this very spot, at this very hour, and I shall be happy recalling the day before. This spot is dear to me already. I have two or three such spots in Petersburg. Once my memories even made me weep, like you . . . who can tell, perhaps you, too, were weeping for your memories a little while ago. But pray forgive me, I have forgotten myself again. Perhaps you were once very happy here."

"Very well," said the girl. "I think I'll come here tomorrow, at ten o'clock. I see that I cannot forbid you to come. The point is that I shall have to be here; do not think that I am making a rendezvous with you, I am warning you that I shall have to be here for my own reasons. There's only one thing . . . oh well, I'll tell you frankly: I shall not mind if you come too. Firstly there might be some unpleasantness like there was tonight, but that's beside the point. In short, I should simply like to see you . . . to say a few words to you. But you will not judge me severely now, will you? You won't think that I make rendezvous too freely? I wouldn't have made this one either, if only. . . . But let it remain my secret. However, on one condition."

"One condition! Tell me, tell me now: I agree to any condition, I am prepared for anything," I cried, enraptured. "I shall answer for myself, I shall be obedient, respectful . . . you know me."

"It is only because I do know you that I am inviting you tomorrow," the girl replied with a laugh. "I know you perfectly. But mind you come on condition that (and

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

do be so kind and do what I am about to ask of you—you see how frank I am?) you do not fall in love with me.... You mustn't, I assure you. I am prepared to be your friend, here is my hand ... but you must not fall in love with me, I beg you!"

"I swear!" I cried, grasping her hand.

"Come, do not swear. I know you are likely to flare up like gunpowder. Do not mind my saying so? If you only knew.... I too have no one to talk to, no one to advise me. Of course, the street is not the place to look for advisers, but you are an exception. I feel I know you so well, as though we have been friends for twenty years. You will not break your promise, will you?"

"You shall see ... but now I don't know how to survive the intervening hours."

"Sleep soundly, that's the way. Good-night, and remember that I have already put my trust in you. How well you said it that surely every feeling, even brotherly compassion, did not have to be accounted for! D'you know, it was so well said that it instantly occurred to me to confide in you."

"Do, for heaven's sake, but confide what?"

"Until tomorrow. Let it remain a secret till then. So much the better for you, it will seem like a romance, if only in imagination. Maybe I'll tell you everything tomorrow, and maybe not. I shall talk to you first, we'll come to know each other better."

"Oh yes! I shall tell you everything about myself tomorrow! But what is it? It's as if a miracle were happening to me ... where am I, dear God? Tell me, surely you cannot be displeased with yourself because you did not become angry, like anyone else would have done, and sent me away at the outset? Just two minutes, and you have made me happy for ever. Yes, happy! Who can tell, perhaps you have reconciled me to myself, dispelled my doubts. Perhaps I'm just given to spells like that. Oh well, I'll tell you everything tomorrow, you'll know everything, everything."

"Very well, so be it. You will be the one to begin."

"If you wish."

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

We parted. I walked all night long, I could not bring myself to go home, I was so happy ... Till tomorrow!

SECOND NIGHT

"You see, you have survived!" she said to me, laughing and shaking both my hands.

"I've been here for two hours; you can't imagine what this day has been like for me!"

"I can, I can ... but let's get to the point. Do you know why I'm here? I didn't come here to chat about trifles the way we did last night, you know. Now then: we must act more sensibly in future. I thought about all this for a long time last night."

"But in what way must we be more sensible? For my part I am willing, but truly this is the most sensible thing that ever happened to me in my life!"

"Really? First of all I must ask you not to crush my hands so, and secondly I want you to know that I wondered about you for a long time today."

"Well, and what did you conclude?"

"Conclude? I concluded that we must begin from the beginning, because this morning I came to realise that I hardly knew you, that last night I behaved like a child, like a silly girl, and it naturally followed that the fault lay in my kind heart, in other words I ended up by praising myself the way one always does when one begins to analyse one's actions. And so, to correct my fault, I decided to find out everything about you to the smallest detail. But since there's no one I could ask, you must tell me everything yourself, all your secrets. Now, what sort of person are you? Hurry and answer me, tell me the story of your life."

"My story?" I cried in alarm. "My story! But who told you I had a story? I have no story."

"How did you live then if you have no story?" she interrupted me with a laugh.

"There's no story to my life at all! I have simply lived

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

all by myself, entirely alone that is—alone, quite alone—do you know what it means—alone?"

"But how—alone? D'you mean you've never even seen anyone?"

"Oh no, I do see people of course, but nevertheless I am alone."

"Don't you ever talk to anyone?"

"In the strict sense of the word—no."

"But what sort of a person are you, do explain! Wait a minute, I think I know: you probably have a grandmother like I do. She's blind and it's ages since I've been allowed to go anywhere, and so I've almost lost the habit of conversation. And once, two years ago, I did something naughty and then she saw there was no holding me, so she called me to her and pinned my dress to hers with a safety pin—and that's the way we've been sitting pinned together day after day, ever since then. She sits and knits a sock, blind though she is, and I've got to stay beside her, sewing or reading aloud to her. It's such an odd custom, pinning down someone for two whole years."

"Good heavens! What a misfortune! But no, I have no grandmother like that."

"But if you haven't what makes you stay at home?"

"Look here, do you want to know who I am?"

"Of course I do."

"In the strict sense?"

"In the strictest!"

"Very well. I am a type."

"A type? What sort of type?" the girl exclaimed and burst out laughing so merrily one might have thought she had not had a chance to laugh for a whole year. "Oh, you're such fun! Look, there's a bench over there, let's sit down. No one ever comes here, no one will hear us, and begin on your story now, because you do have one, whatever you may say, you're just making a secret of it. First of all, what does 'type' mean?"

"A type? A type is an eccentric, a funny sort of man," I replied, joining in her child-like laughter. "It's that sort of character. Listen, do you know what a dreamer is?"

"A dreamer? Goodness, who doesn't? I'm a dreamer myself! When I sit beside Grandmama, the things that

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

come into my head sometimes! And then I start weaving dreams, and they carry me so far away I almost see myself marrying a Chinese prince! You know, it's good to be a dreamer sometimes. But no, perhaps it isn't, I don't know, especially if you have something else to think about," the girl added, rather seriously now.

"Splendid! Since you've seen yourself marrying a Chinese prince you'll be able to understand me perfectly. Now then, listen. But just a moment—I don't even know your name yet!"

"At last! You didn't think of it too soon, did you?"

"Oh good heavens, it never entered my head. I was happy enough without."

"My name is Nastenka."

"Nastenka—is that all?"

"That's all. Isn't it enough, you greedy man?"

"Enough? On the contrary, it's plenty, it's more than plenty. Nastenka, you must be a very kind-hearted girl since you're allowing me to call you Nastenka right away!"

"I hope I am. Well, carry on."

"Now then, Nastenka, just listen to this amusing story!"

I sat down beside her, assumed a primly grave attitude and began as if I were reciting a memorised passage:

"You may not be aware of it, Nastenka, but there are some rather queer corners in Petersburg. The sun, which shines for all the rest of the city, never seems to peep into those places. It's another sun that does, a new one, specially ordered for those remote corners, and it throws a different, a peculiar light on everything. Life in those remote corners seems a world apart, in no way resembling the life that seethes about us; it is the sort of life that could be going on in some fabulous and strange kingdom, and not on our planet at all, in these very, very serious times of ours. And this life is that peculiar mixture of something that is purely fantastic, ardently idealistic and also, at the same time (alas, Nastenka), bleakly humdrum and ordinary, not to say incredibly banal."

"Oh! Good heavens, what a preamble! What am I going to hear, I wonder?"

"Nastenka (I think I'll never tire of repeating your name), Nastenka, you'll hear that these remote corners

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

are inhabited by some queer people—by dreamers. A dreamer—if you must know the precise definition of the word—is not a real person, he's a sort of neuter creature, you see. This creature usually settles down in some inaccessible corner, as if he were hiding from the very light of day, and once he crawls into his shell, he grows attached to it like a snail or, rather, in this respect he resembles that very amusing animal, which is a house and an animal all in one, called the turtle. Why is he so fond of his four walls, invariably coated with green paint, his grimy, dismal and outrageously smoke-blackened walls, do you think? And why, when one of his few friends comes to call on him—and he ends up by having no friends left at all—why does this funny gentleman receive his visitor in such a state of confusion, why is he so embarrassed, his features so contorted, as if he had just committed a crime within his four walls, or had been engaged in forging banknotes or making up some verses he was going to send to a magazine, accompanied by an anonymous letter saying that the poet himself was dead, but he, his friend, considered it his sacred duty to have the rhymes published? Why, tell me, Nastenka, is the conversation between those two so stilted? Why is there neither laughter nor some witty remark from the puzzled visitor who, under other circumstances, is very fond of laughter and witty remarks, of discussing the fair sex and chatting on other cheerful subjects? Why does this friend, who is obviously a new acquaintance paying his first and only call (for in this case there will be no second, because the friend will never call again), why does this friend become so embarrassed and tongue-tied for all his quickness of wit (if he has it) when he sees the upset expression of his host, who in his turn has become utterly confused and deprived of all coherence after his valiant but vain attempts to cover the gaps and brighten up the conversation, to show that he, too, is well versed in the social niceties, to make some sort of remark about the fair sex and with this submission, if nothing else, to endear himself to the poor man who has come calling on him by mistake? Why does the visitor snatch up his hat so suddenly and hurry away, remembering all at once a most

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

important and non-existent appointment, pulling his hand free of his host's feverish grasp, while the latter does everything he can to show that he is sorry and to try and remedy the situation? Why does the visitor burst out laughing as soon as he is out of the room, swearing there and then never to call on this queer man again, although, in point of fact, the queer man is a splendid chap really; but at the same time he cannot refuse his imagination to indulge in a little game. That is, to draw a comparison—far fetched though it be—between the face of his host, the way it looked all the time they were in conversation, and that of a miserable little kitten which, after being mauled about, terrorised and maltreated in every possible way by some children who have taken it prisoner by foul means, has crept away to hide from them under a chair, forced to spend a whole hour there, bristling and sneezing, washing its pathetic little face with both paws, after which and for a long time to come, it is to look with animosity upon the world in general and even upon the bits and pieces from the master's table, saved up for it by the kind housekeeper?"

"I say," broke in Nastenka, who had all this time been listening to me in wonder, with her eyes wide and lips parted, "I say, I have no idea why all this has happened or why you are asking me such funny questions at all; but what I know definitely is that all those experiences from beginning to end have happened to you."

"Undoubtedly," I replied with a most serious mien.

"Well if that is so, go on," she said, "because I very much want to know how it will all end."

"You want to know, Nastenka, what the hero was doing in his remote corner, or rather I, for the hero of the story was myself, my own modest self; you want to know why the unexpected visit of my friend threw me off my balance, disconcerting me for a whole day? You want to know why I was so startled and flustered when the door opened so suddenly; why I was incapable of receiving my visitor properly and collapsed so ignominiously under the brunt of my own hospitality?"

"Yes, that's it," Nastenka replied. "That's what I'd like to know. Look, you are telling it splendidly, but

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

couldn't you somehow make your speech less splendid? Because you sound as if you were reading it out of a book."

"Nastenka," I replied in a grave and stern voice, barely mastering my desire to laugh. "Dear Nastenka, I know that my speech is splendid, but I am sorry I cannot talk differently. At the moment, Nastenka dear, I'm like the ghost of King Solomon, which, after having been kept in a pot sealed down with seven seals, had at last had all the seven seals removed. My dear Nastenka, now that we have met again after our long separation—for I have known you a long time, Nastenka, I have long been searching for someone, and that is a sign you are the one I have been searching for and that this meeting of ours has been preordained—now a thousand taps have burst open in my head, and I must give vent to a torrent of words or else I shall suffocate. And so I beg you not to interrupt me, Nastenka, but to hear me out meekly and attentively, or I shall say no more."

"No, no, no, oh no, continue, do! I shan't say another word."

"To continue: there is one hour during my day which I am exceptionally fond of, my dear friend Nastenka. It's that hour when most of the work, duties and business is done, and everyone is hurrying home to dinner, to take a nap, or to spend the evening, the night, and all the rest of his leisure in various jolly pastimes, which he plans as he hurries along. At that hour our hero too—for you must permit me, Nastenka, to carry on this narrative in the third person, since I'd feel terribly bashful about telling all this in the first person—and so, our hero, whose day has not been idle either, strides on with everyone else. But his pale and somewhat wan face is aglow with a curious expression of pleasure. He watches, not indifferently, the setting sun slowly sinking in the cold sky of St. Petersburg. But when I say he watches it I'm telling a lie: he does not watch it, he contemplates it absently as it were, as if he were tired or engrossed in something else, something of greater interest, so all he could spare the world about him was a fleeting, rather casual moment. He is pleased because he is through with his vexa-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

tious affairs until the morrow, and he is delighted like a schoolboy who has been allowed to leave the schoolroom and set free to play his favourite games and pranks. Just glance at him, Nastenka, you'll see at once that the pleasure he feels has already had a happy effect on his weak nerves and his morbid imagination. Now he is lost in reverie. Do you think it's his dinner he is thinking of? Or the evening's amusements? What is he staring at so? Is it the gentleman of imposing appearance bowing so picturesquely to the lady who is driving past in a gleaming carriage drawn by fleet-footed horses? No, Nastenka, what do all those trifles mean to him now? He is rich with the wealth of his own peculiar world now; he came into these riches quite suddenly, it was not in vain that the parting ray of the setting sun flashed so merrily before him, warming his heart and stirring in it a host of fancies. He hardly notices the road where but a moment before he would have been struck by the merest trifles. For already the Goddess of Fancy (if you have read Zhukovsky, dear Nastenka) has whimsically interlaced the golden warp on her loom and has begun to weave a tissue of dreams for him, dreams of a fabulous, fantastic life, and who knows, perhaps with her magic hand she has whisked him off the splendid granite pavement he was treading homewards to the seventh crystal heaven. If you stopped him and asked him abruptly where he was or what streets he had walked through, he probably wouldn't be able to remember a thing, neither where he had been nor where he was, and, blushing in his embarrassment, he would certainly have invented some tale to save his dignity. And that's why he is so startled, why he almost screams and looks about him in alarm when a very respectable old lady stops him politely in the middle of the pavement and asks him to show her the way. Scowling with annoyance, he strides on, barely conscious of the passers-by who smile at him and turn back to look after him, or of the little girl who steps timorously out of his way and then bursts into peals of laughter when she sees his wide, contemplative smile and his gesticulating hands. But then the same Goddess of Fancy picks up and carries away on her playful flight the old lady, the curious passers-by, the laugh-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

ing little girl and the boatmen, already eating their supper on their barges which clutter up the Fontanka (that is, supposing our hero is passing it at the time); she mischievously weaves everyone and everything into her golden tapestry, the way flies are woven into a spider's web, and the queer man enters his delightful little lair endowed with this new wealth; he sits down, has his dinner and is only aroused from his dreams when Matryona, his pensive and ever sorrowful servant woman, has cleared the table and brought him his pipe. He stirs and remembers with surprise that he has already finished his dinner, having missed the process entirely. The room grows dark; emptiness and sadness fill his heart; a whole realm of fancy crumbles around him, crumbles away into dust with no noise or crash, it has flitted past like a dream, and he does not even remember what he has been dreaming about. But now some obscure sensation, a new desire, which makes his heart throb and ache a little, is exciting and stimulating his imagination seductively and, imperceptibly, calling up a throng of new phantoms.... Silence reigns in the little room; his imagination basks in solitude and languor; it flares up softly, it begins to bubble like the water in old Matryona's coffeepot, as she fusses about in the kitchen next door, making her coffee with not another care in the world. Then his fancy begins to break through in little spurts of fire, and the book, taken up aimlessly and at random, falls from my dreamer's hand unread but for a page or two. His imagination is roused and tuned up again, and suddenly a new world, a new, fascinating world flashes before his mind in all its dazzling possibilities. A new dream—a new happiness! A new dose of poison, subtle and sensuous. What does he care for our real life! From his drugged point of view, you and I are leading such a slow, lazy, and sluggish life, Nastenka; from his point of view we are all so dissatisfied with our lot, we are finding life so wearisome. And indeed, look how cold, how sullen and angry we seem to be with one another. Poor souls, my dreamer thinks. And no wonder he thinks so! Look at the magic, animated picture those phantoms weave for him so fascinatingly, so intricately and so generously, with himself, of course, our dreamer in

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

person, as the most important character, ever in the foreground. Look at the variety of adventures, look at the never ending flow of his rapturous dreams! You will ask, perhaps, what does he dream of? Why ask? Of everything. Of being a poet, unacclaimed at first and later crowned with glory; of Hoffman's friendship, of St. Bartholomew's Night, of Diana Vernon, of playing a heroic part in the conquest of Kazan by Tsar Ivan, of Clara Mowbray, of Effie Deans, of the Council of Prelates with Huss before it, of the resurrection of the dead in *Robert the Devil* (remember the music? that graveyard odour it has?), of Minna and Brenda, of the Battle at the Berezina, of reading poems in the salon of Countess V.-D., of Danton, of Cleopatra *ei suoi amanti*, of a little house in Kolomna, a nook of his own and a lovely creature beside him, listening to him on a wintry night with eyes wide and lips parted, the way you are listening to me now, my little angel. No, Nastenka, that sensual sluggard cares nothing for the life that you and I are so anxious to taste. He thinks it's a poor and wretched life, he cannot know that for him, too, the bell may toll sadly one day, when for a single hour of this wretched life he'd give all his years of fancy, not in exchange for joy or happiness either, he would not even want to choose in that hour of sorrow, regret, and untrammelled grief. But until that dreadful hour strikes, he desires nothing, for he is above desire, for he already has everything, he is satiated, because he is his own artist, creating new world for himself whenever a new whim urges him. And then you know, this fairy-tale, this world of fancy can be created so easily, so naturally, as though it were indeed not a phantom at all! Truly, at times I quite believe that this world is not a mirage, not the creation of my excited senses, not a trick played by my imagination, but that it's actually real, genuine, it exists. Then why, tell me, Nastenka, why is my spirit anguished at moments like those? Why then, what magic, what strange power makes the pulse quicken, brings tears to the dreamer's eyes, suffuses his pale, tear-stained cheeks with colour, and fills his whole being with a joy so heavenly? Why do his sleepless nights seem to pass so quickly in infinite happiness and gaiety, and why

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

when the first rosy sunbeam flashes across the window and the dawn sends its eerie and uncertain light into his room, the way it does here in St. Petersburg, why does our dreamer, fatigued and exhausted, throw himself across his bed and fall asleep, swooning with ecstasy which obsesses his diseased and shaken spirit, and with a pain so insufferably sweet filling his heart? Yes, Nastenka, it deceives you and you unwittingly come to believe that the passion stirring in his soul is real and genuine, you come to believe there is indeed something tangible, animate, in his incorporeal dreams. Think of the deceit of it! For instance, love enters his heart in all its infinite joyousness, with all its poignant torment. A mere glance at him will convince you! Would you believe it, looking at him, Nastenka dear, that he has never really known the one he has loved so in his rapturous dreams? Surely he could not have seen her in his deceptive fantasies alone and have only dreamed of this passion? Can it be true that they did not really go through so many years of their lives together, hand in hand, just the two of them, forsaking the whole world and joining their destinies, their two private worlds into one? Then was it not she who lay sobbing and grieving upon his breast that night, the night of parting, deaf to the storm raging beneath the sombre sky, heedless of the wind that was blowing the teardrops off her black eyelashes and whisking them away? Surely it could not have all been a dream—that garden, too, dismal, neglected, and wild, its paths overgrown with moss, that gloomy and lonely garden where they had walked so often, hoping, despairing, and loving, yes, loving each other so long, so long and so tenderly? And that strange ancestral home where she had lived for so many years in retirement and sadness with her morose, ever taciturn and choleric old husband whom they feared as though they were two timid children, concealing their love from each other so timorously and disconsolately? What agony they suffered, how frightened they were, how pure and innocent was their love, and how vicious people were (that goes without saying, Nastenka!). But good God, can it be that it was not her he met again long afterwards, far from the shores of his homeland, under a foreign sky, a hot

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

and sultry sky in the beautiful eternal city, at a brilliant ball, to the resounding strains of the orchestra, at the palazzo (it had to be a palazzo) flooded with light; was it not her he saw on the balcony, entwined with roses and myrtle? Where, the moment she saw him, she lifted her mask so hastily, and whispering, 'I am free' flew, trembling, into his arms; with a cry of joy, they clung together, and in a moment everything was forgotten: their sorrow and their separation, all their sufferings, the gloomy house, the old and taciturn man, the cheerless garden in their distant homeland, the garden seat where with a parting, passionate kiss, she tore herself away from his arms, grown numb with the agony of despair. Oh Nastenka, you must agree that you would be startled, you'd blush and behave like a schoolboy who had just stuffed into his pocket an apple he had stolen from the neighbours' garden, if your door were suddenly flung open to admit an uninvited friend, some tall, robust chap, a merry soul and a wit, shouting as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened, 'And I'm just back from Pavlovsk this very minute, old chap!' Oh God! The old count was dead, the hour of ineffable happiness was nigh, and here was someone who had just arrived from Pavlovsk!"

I paused dramatically, having come to the end of my dramatic utterances. I remember how hard I strove to bring myself to laugh just then, for I could already feel some hostile imp stirring in my heart, my breath was caught in my throat, my chin was beginning to quiver and my eyes were swimming more and more. I was afraid that Nastenka, who had been listening to me with her clever eyes wide open, would burst out laughing with her spontaneous, child-like laughter, and I felt sorry I had gone so far, had needlessly told that which had long been overburdening my heart, which I could recite like a passage committed to memory because I had long ago passed a verdict on myself and I had been tempted to read it out to her, although, I must admit, I did not expect to be understood. But, to my surprise, she remained silent and a little later pressed my hand lightly and asked with a note of timid interest:

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"Have you really lived like that all your life?"

"All my life, Nastenka," I replied. "All my life, and I suppose I shall go on like this till the end."

"No, no, you can't!" she said anxiously. "It won't be so, for then I, too, might have to spend the rest of my life sitting beside my Grandmama. Do you know that it's not right at all to live like that?"

"I do, Nastenka, I do!" I cried, restraining my emotion no longer. "I know it better than ever now that I have wasted the best years of my life. I know it now, and the knowledge hurts me more, for God Himself has sent you to me, my kind angel, to tell me this and to convince me in this knowledge. Now that I am sitting here beside you, talking to you, I dread the thought of the future, for the future holds nothing but loneliness again, nothing but that senseless, musty life; and what am I to dream of now that I have been so happy with you in reality! Oh, you dear girl, may you be blessed because you did not repulse me, because now I can say that I have lived at least two evenings in my life!"

"Oh no, no!" Nastenka cried, and teardrops glistened on her eyelashes. "No, it will not be so! We shall not part like that! What are two evenings!"

"Nastenka, oh Nastenka! Do you know that you have reconciled me to myself for a long time to come now? Do you know that I shall no longer think so ill of myself as I am sometimes apt to do? Do you know that I may not despair any longer that I have committed a crime and a sin in my life, for a life like mine is a crime and a sin? And pray do not think I have exaggerated anything to you, for heaven's sake do not think that, Nastenka, because at times I am possessed by melancholy, such utter melancholy.... Because when these spells come over me, I begin to think that I am incapable of ever starting to live a new, a real life, because it seems to me that I have already lost all touch, all sense of the real and the actual, because I had been selling my soul, because my nights of fantasy are now followed by moments of soberness, and they are frightening! And meanwhile, you can hear life clamouring and eddying about you in a human whirlpool, you can hear, you can see people living—living a real

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

life, you can see that their world has not been made to order, that it will not be shattered like a dream or a vision, that their life is ever youthful, ever rejuvenescent, and that every hour in it differs from the last, whereas timorous fancy is bleak and monotonous to the point of boredom, a slave to every shadow and notion, a slave to the first cloud that blots out the sun and wrings with distress the hearts of every true man of St. Petersburg who sets so much store by its sun—and what is fancy in distress? You can feel the constant strain wearing out and exhausting your inexhaustible fancy at last, because you are maturing, you are outgrowing your former ideals; they are shattered to pieces, reduced to dust; if you have no other life to live, you are compelled to rebuild it out of the same broken bits and pieces. And yet your soul yearns for and demands something different! In vain the dreamer rakes up the ashes of his old dreams, hoping to find at least a tiny spark among the ruins in order to fan it to life again, to warm his chilled heart with this resurrected fire and bring back to it all that was so dear before, that moved it, that set his blood on fire, that wrung tears from his eyes and deceived him so gloriously! Do you know what I have come to, Nastenka? Do you know that I now have to mark the anniversary of my past emotions, of my affection for what has been before but actually had never happened, because this anniversary, too, has to be observed according to the same foolish, incorporeal dreams; I am driven to it because the foolish dreams themselves are no more, for I have nothing to support them with; you have to live your dreams too, you know. Do you know that now I like to remember and revisit, on certain dates, the spots where I have once known happiness in my own peculiar way, I like to attune my present to my irrevocable past, and often I wander up and down the alleyways and streets of St. Petersburg like a ghost, depressed and sad, with no aim or purpose. Oh the memories that are mine! I recall, for instance, that here, exactly a year ago to the hour, I had wandered up and down the same pavement as lonely and depressed as I am now! And I recall that my dreams were just as sad, and though it wasn't any better then than it is now, you some-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

how can't help thinking that life was easier and more tranquil in those days, untroubled as it was by that black thought which is harassing me now; that I was not preyed upon by these pangs of conscience, grim and painful pangs, which give me no peace, day and night. And you ask yourself: where are those dreams of yours? You shake your head and say: how the years go by! And again you ask yourself: what have you done with your life? Where have you buried your best years? Have you lived or not? Look, you tell yourself, look how cold it's becoming in the world. More years will pass, bringing dismal loneliness with them, and then shivering old age will come leaning on a crutch, and after that just misery and bleakness. Your phantom world will grow dim, your dreams will wither and fall like dead, yellow leaves. Oh Nastenka, won't it be sad to remain alone, entirely alone, with nothing even to regret—nothing, nothing at all ... for whatever I lose, all that will have been nothing, a mere, stupid nought, nothing but dreams!"

"Oh, don't go on, I'm crying already," said Nastenka, wiping away a tear. "It's all over now! There will be two of us now, we'll never part again, no matter what happens to me. I am a simple girl. I have not studied much, though Grandmama did hire a teacher for me, but truly I can understand you, because everything you have just told me I went through myself when Grandmama kept me pinned to her dress. Of course I couldn't have told it as well as you have done, because I've never studied," she added bashfully, for she still felt a certain respect for my dramatic speech and my lofty style. "But I am very glad you have opened your heart to me. Now I know you, I know you perfectly. And d'you know, I want to tell you my story, too, all of it, without reserve, and for this you'll give me your advice afterwards. You are a very clever person; will you promise to give me your advice afterwards?"

"Ah Nastenka!" I replied. "Though I've never been an adviser, and a clever one at that, I see now that if we're to go on like this, it will be the best thing possible, and then each of us will advise the other most cleverly. Well, my pretty Nastenka, what do you want to know? Tell me

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

frankly; I am so happy now, so gay, so daring and wise that I shan't have to search for an answer!"

"No, no," Nastenka interrupted, laughing, "it's not just a clever bit of advice I'm looking for, but sincere and brotherly counsel, the sort you'd give me if you had been fond of me all your life."

"Very well, Nastenka, very well!" I cried exultantly. "And had I been fond of you for twenty years, I nevertheless could not have been fonder of you than I am now!"

"Your hand!" said Nastenka.

"Take it!" I gave her my hand.

"And so we shall begin my story."

NASTENKA'S STORY

"You know half of my story already, at least you know that I have an old grandmother."

"If the other half is as brief as this one. . ." I broke in with a smile.

"Be quiet and listen. I must make one condition though: do not interrupt me or I'll make a muddle of it. Do listen quietly now.

"I have an old grandmother. I went to live with her when I was a very little girl, because both my mother and my father were dead. I suppose Grandmama was wealthier then than she is now, for she still recalls those better days. She taught me French herself, and then she hired a tutor for me. When I was fifteen (I'm seventeen now), my studies came to an end. That was when I did that naughty thing; what it was I shall not tell you, it is sufficient to say that it was nothing much. But Grandmama called me to her one morning and said that being blind she could not keep an eye on me and, taking a safety pin, she pinned my dress to hers, and that's when she told me we'd stay like that for the rest of our days, unless I improved, of course. Well, in the beginning there was no hope of getting away at all. I had to sit by Grandmama's side whether I was reading, studying or knitting. I tried cunning once, and talked Fyokla into taking my place. Fyokla is our servant woman, she's deaf. She took my seat; Grandmama fell asleep in her chair just then

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

and I went off to see a girl who lived near by. It all ended badly of course. Grandmama woke up and said something, thinking I was still sitting quietly beside her. Fyokla saw that Grandmama was asking a question, but she could not hear what it was, she thought and thought what she should do, and then she undid the pin and ran away."

At this Nastenka burst out laughing. I laughed with her. She broke off abruptly.

"I say, you mustn't laugh at Grandmama. I can, because it's funny. Grandmama really can't help being like that, but still I do love her a little. I was punished good and proper then; back in my place I was put, and I could not so much as move a finger after that.

"Well then, I forgot to tell you that we, or rather Grandmama, has a house of her own, I mean a tiny little house, with three windows facing the street, it's all wooden and as old as Grandmama herself, and there's an attic; one day a new lodger moved into this attic."

"That means you had an old lodger before," I remarked casually.

"Of course we had," Nastenka replied, "and that one could hold his tongue better than you can. It's true, he could hardly move his tongue at all by then. He was a little old man, he was thin, deaf, blind, and lame, and at last he could not go on living any longer and he went and died. That's why we had to have a new lodger, because we can't manage without one; that and Grandmama's pension is about all we have. As luck would have it, the new lodger was a young man, a newcomer, not a local man. Grandmama let him have the room because he didn't haggle over the rent, and then she asked me, 'Tell me, Nastenka, is our lodger a young man?' I did not want to tell a lie, so I said, 'He's not particularly young, Grandmama, neither is he old.' 'And is his appearance pleasing?' she asked. And again I did not want to tell a lie, so I said, 'Yes, his appearance is pleasing.' And Grandmama said, 'Ah, what a shame, what a shame! I'm warning you, Granddaughter, don't you look at him or think about him. Dear me, what the world is coming to! Just imagine, a mere attic lodger and his appearance is pleasing too; it wasn't like this in my day!'

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"Grandmama was always harping on 'her day'. She was younger in her day, and the sun shone warmer in her day, and cream did not turn sour so quickly then—everything went back to 'her day'. There was I sitting and thinking: now why does Grandmama herself put ideas into my head, asking me if our lodger is handsome and young? But the thought just occurred to me in passing, I took up my knitting again, counted the stitches, and forgot all about it.

"We had promised to paper our lodger's room for him, and so one morning he came in to inquire about it. One word led to another, Grandmama's chatty, you know, and then she said, 'Go to my bedroom, Nastenka, and fetch me the counting board.' I jumped up at once, blushing all over—I don't know why—and quite forgetting I was pinned down; instead of undoing the pin stealthily, so the lodger shouldn't see, I started up and Grandmama's chair slid along the floor. When I saw that the lodger knew everything about me now, I blushed and froze to the spot, suddenly bursting into tears—the bitterness and shame of it was more than I could bear! Grandmama shouted, 'What are you standing there for?' and I cried harder than ever. When the lodger saw that I was ashamed because of him, he took his leave at once and went away.

"And ever afterwards, I almost died if I heard a sound in the hall. There comes the lodger, I'd think, and I would quietly undo the pin, just to be on the safe side. But it was never he, he never came. Two weeks went by; one day the lodger sent us a message through Fyokla to say that he had plenty of French books, all good books, fit to read, and he wondered if Grandmama would like me to read them to her for a change. Grandmama accepted his offer gratefully, but she kept asking if the books were moral, because if they were immoral, she said, 'it would never do for you to read them, Nastenka, because they'd teach you to do wrong.'

" 'But what would they teach me, Grandmama? What's written in them?' I asked.

" 'Ah,' she said, 'they're all about young men seducing decent girls, carrying them off from their parents' homes, pretending they want to marry them, abandoning these

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

poor girls to their fate afterwards, and the end the girls come to is too sad to relate. I've read many such books,' Grandmama said, 'and they tell all this so beautifully, that you stay up all night, reading them on the quiet. So mind you don't ever read them, Nastenka! What sort of books has he sent, you say?'

" 'Novels by Sir Walter Scott, all of them, Grandmama.'

" 'Sir Walter Scott's novels? Are you sure there's no trick here? Take a look and see if he hasn't hidden a love letter in one of them.'

" 'No, Grandmama,' I said, 'there is no letter.'

" 'Look under the binding, they sometimes push them under the binding, the scamps!'

" 'No, Grandmama, there's nothing under the binding either.'

" 'Well mind there isn't!'

"And so we began to read Sir Walter Scott, and in a month we finished half the books. Then our lodger sent us more and more books, he sent us some Pushkin too, so finally I couldn't live without books, and I stopped dreaming of marrying a Chinese prince.

"That's how it was when one day I chanced upon our lodger on the stairs. Grandmama had sent me to fetch something. He stopped. I blushed, and he blushed too; he smiled, however, said how d'you do, asked how Grandmama was and then inquired, 'Have you read the books?' I replied, 'I have.' 'Which book did you like best?' he asked, and I said, 'I liked *Ivanhoe* and Pushkin best of all.' That was all there was on that occasion.

"A week later I came across him on the stairs again. Grandmama hadn't sent me that time, I had to get something for myself. It was after two, the hour when our lodger usually came home. 'How d'you do,' he said, and I said, 'How d'you do.' 'Tell me,' he said, 'don't you find it dull sitting with your grandmama all day long?'

"When he asked me that, I felt hot with shame and bitterness again, I really don't know why unless it was because others were beginning to ask me questions about this business. I thought I'd say nothing and go away, but I had not the strength.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

" 'You're a good girl,' he said, 'forgive me for talking to you like this, but I assure you I feel a deeper concern for you than your Grandmama does. Have you no friends at all you could go and visit?'

"I told him I had none, there had been one, Mashenka, but she'd gone away to Pskov.

" 'Look,' he said, 'would you like to come to the theatre with me?'

" 'The theatre? But what will Grandmama say?'

" 'Come without telling Grandmama.'

" 'No,' I said, 'I don't want to deceive Grandmama. Good-bye.'

" 'Good-bye,' he said and didn't utter another word.

"And then after dinner the same day he came to us; he took a chair, talked long with Grandmama, asked her if she ever went out at all, and if she had any friends, and suddenly he said: 'I've taken a box for the Opera tonight, the *Barber of Seville* is on; some friends of mine were coming, but then they changed their minds, and now I have the tickets to spare.'

" 'The *Barber of Seville*!' Grandmama cried. 'Is that the same *Barber* they used to play in my day?'

" 'Yes,' he said, 'the very same *Barber*.' And he gave me a look. I had understood it all already, I blushed and my heart leapt in anticipation.

" 'Why, of course,' Grandmama said, 'of course, I know it! I myself used to play the part of Rosina in our home theatricals in the old days.'

" 'Wouldn't you care to come tonight?' the lodger asked. 'I have the tickets, you know.'

" 'Yes, I think we'll go,' said Grandmama. 'Why shouldn't we? And then my Nastenka has never been to the theatre yet.'

"Oh heavens, what joy! We began to get ready at once, we dressed and went. Grandmama is blind, but she wanted to hear the music and, besides, she's a kind-hearted old lady; she wanted to give me a treat, we'd never have arranged to go by ourselves. I can't tell you what my impressions were of the *Barber of Seville*, but I will say that all evening long our lodger kept looking at me so kindly, he spoke to me so nicely that I instantly grasped

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Nanak Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

that he had only been putting me to the test that morning, when he asked me to go alone with him. I was overjoyed. I went to sleep that night feeling so proud and happy, my heart beat so, it made me slightly feverish, and all night long I raved of the *Barber of Seville*.

"I thought that now he'd come calling on us more frequently, but I was quite mistaken. He almost ceased coming altogether. He'd drop in casually once a month or so, and only to invite us to come to the theatre again. We did go once or twice. But I wasn't pleased with that at all. I saw that he was merely sorry for me because Grandmama was treating me so badly, and that was all there was to it. I brooded and brooded and then something came over me: I couldn't sit still, I couldn't read, I couldn't work at my knitting, I'd laugh sometimes and do something to spite Grandmama, or another time I'd simply weep. I grew so thin, I almost fell ill. The Opera season was over and our lodger stopped coming to see us altogether; when we happened to meet—on the same stairs of course—he would bow to me so gravely and so silently as if he didn't want to talk to me at all, and he'd be out on the porch and away, while I still stood halfway up the stairs, blushing red like a cherry, because whenever I saw him all the blood came rushing to my head.

"It's almost the end now. Last May, our lodger called on Grandmama and told her that since he had completed all his affairs here, he would be going away to Moscow again for a year. When I heard this, I turned pale and sank fainting on to a chair. Grandmama noticed nothing, while he, after announcing his departure, bowed and left.

"What was I to do? I thought and thought, I fretted and worried, and at last I came to a decision. He was to leave on the morrow and I made up my mind to take the final step that very evening after Grandmama had retired. And this I did. I made a bundle of all the dresses I had and some underclothes, and with the bundle in my arms, more dead than alive, I climbed the attic stairs to our lodger's room. I think it took me an hour to climb those stairs. I pushed open his door and he gasped when he saw me. He thought I was a ghost. And then he rushed to get me some water for I could hardly stand. My heart

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

was beating so loudly that my head hurt and my mind reeled. When I recovered, I simply put my bundle on his bed and sat down beside it, and, covering my face with my hands, I burst into tears. He must have understood everything at once, for he stood before me so pale and with such a sad look in his eyes that it tore at my heart.

" 'Nastenka,' he began, 'pray listen to me: I cannot do anything; I'm a poor man; I have nothing yet, not even a decent post; what would we live on if I married you?'

"We talked for a long time and finally, in my distraction, I told him I could not live with Grandmama any longer, that I would run away, that I did not want to be pinned down with a safety pin, and that I'd go to Moscow with him whether he wished it or not, because I could not live without him. It was everything—shame, love, and pride, all welling up in me at once, and I fell on his bed, practically in a fit. I so dreaded his refusal!

"He sat on in silence for a few minutes, then he stood up, came close to me and took my hand in his.

" 'My dear, my kind Nastenka,' he began, and tears rolled down his face. 'Hear me out. I swear to you, if ever I am in a position to marry, you and no other will be the one to make me happy. Believe me when I say that you alone could make me happy now. Listen then: I am going away to Moscow and I shall remain there exactly a year. I hope I shall have settled my affairs by then. When I come back, and if you have not ceased loving me, I swear to you we shall be happy. But now it is impossible; I cannot, I have no right to offer anything at all. I repeat, though, that if it does not happen in a year's time, some day it certainly will; it's understood, of course, that it is only in the event of your not preferring another to me, for I cannot and dare not bind you with a promise.'

"That's what he said to me, and he left the following day. We had agreed not to breathe a word of this to Grandmama. He wished it so. There it is, my story is almost finished now. Exactly a year has passed. He has come back, he's been here for three whole days, and. . . ."

"And what?" I cried, impatient to hear the end of the story.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"And he has not shown up yet!" Nastenka replied with an obvious effort. "No word or sound from him."

She stopped, paused a little, dropped her head and, suddenly burying her face in her hands, began to weep so dreadfully it wrung my heart. Never had I expected such an ending.

"Nastenka," I began in a timid and coaxing voice. "Nastenka, for heaven's sake don't cry! How can you know? He may not be here yet."

"He is, he is," Nastenka took up, "he's here, I know it. We had it all arranged the night before he left; when everything had been said and agreed between us, the way I told you now, we came out for a breath of air to this very spot here. It was ten o'clock, we sat on this bench, I wasn't crying any more, I listened enraptured to what he was saying ... he said he'd come to me the moment he returned, and if I didn't refuse him, we would tell Grandmama all about it. And now he's back, I know it, and yet he hasn't come, he hasn't come!"

She burst out crying again.

"Good God! Can't something be done to help?" I cried, and sprang up from the bench in utter despair. "Tell me, Nastenka, perhaps if I went and saw him it would help?"

"Could you, d'you think?" she asked, suddenly raising her head.

"No, of course not," I said, realising the folly of it. "I have another idea: write him a letter."

"No, I couldn't possibly, it isn't done," she replied resolutely, but at the same time she dropped her eyes and tried to avoid my gaze.

"Why not? Why isn't it done?" I continued, carried away by my suggestion. "But it must be a special letter, you know. It all depends on the way it's worded. Oh Nastenka, it's truly so! Put your trust in me, pray do! I would not give you ill advice. All this can be put right. You were the one who made the first step then, so why not now?"

"No, no, it will seem that I'm being too forward."

"Ah, my dear sweet Nastenka!" I smiled as I interrupted her. "It won't, it won't, it is your right because he gave you his word. And then, from all you've told me, I can see that he's a tactful man, he acted honourably,"

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

I went on, exulting more and more in the logic of my own reasoning and persuasions. "How did he act? He bound himself with a promise. He said he would not marry anyone but you if ever he married at all, and at the same time he left you perfectly free to refuse him whenever you wished. Therefore you are justified in taking the first step, you have the right, you have the advantage over him, supposing now you wanted to release him from his promise. . . ."

"Tell me, how would you write it?"

"Write what?"

"This letter."

"I'd say, 'Dear Sir. . . .' "

"Must it be dear sir?"

"Certainly. But I don't know, perhaps. . . ."

"Never mind. Go on!"

" 'Dear Sir, I am sorry I. . . .' On second thought no, you need make no excuses. The fact itself will justify everything; write it simply: 'I am writing to you. Forgive me my impatience, but for a whole year now I have lived in hopes of happiness. Am I to blame that now I cannot bear a day of doubt? You have come back, you may have changed your mind. In that case this letter will tell you that I neither repine nor judge you. I do not judge you because I have no power over your heart—such is my fate!

" 'You are a man of honour. You will neither smile nor be annoyed with my impatient lines. You will remember that the one who is writing them is a poor, lonely girl, who has no one to guide or advise her; one who has never been able to master her heart. But forgive the doubt that for a single moment crept into my soul. You are incapable of hurting, even in your thoughts, the one who loved you so and loves you still.' "

"Yes, yes, it's exactly the way I thought it should be," Nastenka cried, and her eyes shone with joy. "Oh you have dispelled my doubts, it's God Himself who sent you to me! Thank you! Thank you!"

"For what—for having been sent to you by God Himself?" I said, looking in delight at her joyful face.

"Yes, if only for that."

"Ah Nastenka! Sometimes, you know, we're grateful to

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

some people for merely living in the same world with us. I'm grateful to you because we came to know each other, because for the rest of my life now I shall remember you!"

"Enough, enough! And now, listen to what I have to say: we had arranged it between us that as soon as he came back he'd let me know at once, by leaving a letter for me with some friends of mine, good, simple people, who know nothing at all about this; or, if he were unable to write to me, for you can't always say everything in a letter, he'd come here the very day of his return at ten o'clock sharp, to this spot where we had made our rendezvous. I know he has arrived, but it's three days now and he has neither come himself, nor left a letter for me. It's quite impossible for me to leave Grandmama during the day. Will you then go to these good people I told you about tomorrow and leave my letter with them? They'll send it on, and if there is an answer, you are to bring it here yourself at ten o'clock."

"But the letter! The letter! You must write the letter first, you know! It won't be until the day after tomorrow then."

"The letter..." said Nastenka in some confusion, "why ... the letter...."

She did not finish. At first she turned away from me, then she blushed like a rose and, suddenly, I felt the letter in my hand, evidently written long ago, all ready, addressed and sealed. A wisp of memory, tender and delicate, flitted through my mind.

"Ro—Ro, si—si, na—na," I began.

"Rosina!" we sang together, I—all but hugging her in my joy, and she—blushing to the roots of her hair, laughing through the tears which glistened like tiny pearls on her black eyelashes.

"Enough, enough! Good-bye, good-bye now!" she said hastily. "Here is the letter, and here is the address where you're to take it. Good-bye till tomorrow!"

She pressed my hands warmly, nodded her head and flew like an arrow into her alleyway. I remained where I was for a long time, following her with my eyes.

"Till tomorrow! Till tomorrow!" raced through my mind, when she had disappeared from view.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

THIRD NIGHT

This was a rainy and doleful day, with never a glimmer of light, a day like my lonely old age will be. Strange thoughts are crowding in on me, feelings so obscure, problems so vague are thronging my mind, and yet I somehow have not the strength or wish to give them clarity. No, it is not for me to solve all this!

We shall not meet tonight. Clouds had begun to gather in the sky and a mist had risen when we said good-bye to each other last night. I said the weather would be bad tomorrow; she made no reply, she did not want to disappoint herself: for her the day would be clear and bright, without the flimsiest cloud to overshadow her happiness.

"If it rains we shall not see each other," she had said. "I shall not come."

I thought she wouldn't even have noticed today's rain, and yet she had not come.

Last night we had our third rendezvous, our third white night. . . .

It is remarkable, however, what beauty one attains through happiness and joy! How one's heart brims over with love! You feel you want to pour out all your love into another heart, you want everything about you to resound with gaiety and laughter. And joy—how contagious it is! Last night there had been such tenderness in her words, such kindness in her heart. She was so sweet to me, so considerate of my feelings, she gave me hope and heart in such caressing tones! Oh what a world of coquetry, inspired by her happiness! And I . . . I thought that it was genuine, I thought that she. . . .

But good God, how could I have thought it? How could I have been so blind when everything belonged to another already, when nothing was mine; when her very tenderness, her solicitude, her love—yes, even her love for me—was nothing but her delight in the coming rendezvous with the other one, her eagerness to share her happiness with me. . . . Because she did frown, she did grow frightened and timid when he failed to come, when we had waited for him in vain. All her movements, all her words became less light, less playful and gay. And, strangely,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

she redoubled her attentions to me, as if she instinctively wanted to lavish on me that which she herself was hoping for and which she dreaded to think might not come true. My Nastenka grew so frightened and perplexed that I believe she finally understood I loved her and took pity on my poor heart. Thus, when we ourselves are unhappy, we are more sensitive to the unhappiness of others; feeling then is not destroyed in us but concentrated rather....

I went to her with a full heart, eager for the hour of the rendezvous to arrive. I had no premonition then of what I should be feeling now. I had no premonition that it would end thus. She was radiant with joy, she was awaiting his reply. He himself was to be her reply. He was to come, to come running at her call. She was there a full hour before I was. Everything amused her at first, she laughed at every word I said.

I was about to tell her what was in my heart, but did not.

"D'you know why I'm so delighted?" she said. "Why I'm so delighted with you? Why I love you so today?"

"No, why?" I asked, and my heart jumped.

"I love you so because you have not fallen in love with me. Why, anyone else in your place would have pestered me and worried me, would have moped and sighed, and you are so nice!"

At this she crushed my hand so hard I almost cried out. She laughed.

"What a wonderful friend you are!" she said very gravely a minute later. "Why, God Himself has sent you to me. Just think, what would have become of me if you hadn't been with me now? You are so unselfish! Your love for me is so generous! We shall be great friends after I am married, greater friends than if we were brother and sister. I shall love you almost as much as him."

For a moment I felt so dreadfully sad; but something not unlike laughter was stirring in my heart.

"You're in a fit," I said, "you're frightened, you think he will not come."

"Heavens, no!" she replied. "Were I less happy I believe I could have cried now from your reproaches and your lack of faith. However, you've given me food for

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

days of thought, but I shall think about it later, and now I confess to you that what you said is true. Yes, it is. I'm all upset somehow, I'm all anticipation and my feelings are somehow too vulnerable. But enough, let us leave our feelings aside."

The sound of footsteps startled us: a man emerged from the gloom and came towards us. We both trembled; she almost cried out. I dropped her hand and made as if to leave her. But we were wrong: it was not he.

"What are you afraid of? Why did you drop my hand?" she asked, and gave me her hand again. "Well then, why not? We'll meet him together. I want him to see how much we love one another."

"How much we love one another!" I cried.

"Oh Nastenka, oh Nastenka!" I thought. "How much that one word means! Love like this weighs upon the spirit heavily and chills the heart. Your hand is cool and mine is hot like fire. Oh Nastenka, how blind you are! . . . Oh how intolerable a happy person is at times! But I could not be angry with you!"

At last I could contain my feelings no longer.

"Nastenka!" I cried. "Do you know what I have been through since last night?"

"No, what? Tell me quickly! Why didn't you say anything until now?"

"To begin with, Nastenka, after I had carried out all your errands, delivered the letter and been to your kind friends, I came home . . . after that I came back home and went to sleep."

"Is that all?" she interrupted me laughingly.

"Yes, almost all," I replied with an effort, for stupid tears were welling up in my eyes. "I awoke an hour before our rendezvous, but I did not seem to have slept at all. I do not understand exactly what it was. I came here to tell you all about it, to tell you that time had seemed to stop for me, that from that moment on one feeling alone, one sensation would have to remain with me for ever after, that the moment would have to last an eternity, as if all life had stopped for me. When I awoke I thought I was remembering a melody that I knew long ago, something sweet, once heard somewhere and then

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

forgotten. It seemed to me that all my life it had been striving to burst forth from my heart and only now. . . ."

"Oh good heavens! Good heavens!" Nastenka broke in. "What is all this about? I don't understand a word you're saying!"

"Ah Nastenka! I so wanted to try and make you feel this strange sensation. . ." I began miserably in a voice which still held a particle of hope, though only a very tiny one.

"Hush, don't go on," she said, for in a flash she understood all, the clever girl!

All at once she became rather unusually talkative, gay, and playful. She took my arm, she laughed and tried to make me laugh as well, and every word I uttered in my confusion brought long peals of laughter from her. I was getting angry and, abruptly, she changed to a flirtatious tone.

"D'you know," she said, "it does vex me a little that you have not fallen in love with me. Puzzle a woman's heart out after this! But anyway, Mister Adamant, you cannot but praise me for my frankness. I tell you everything, everything, no matter how silly the thought that comes into my head!"

"Listen! Can it be eleven?" I said, listening to the rhythmic booming of the bell in the town tower far away. She broke off her laughter, suddenly lapsing into silence, and began to count the strokes.

"Yes, it is eleven," she brought out at last in a timid and quavering voice.

I instantly felt sorry I had frightened her and had made her count the hours, and I cursed myself for my fit of malice. Her plight saddened me and I did not know how to atone for my sin. I began to console her, to invent excuses for him, to try and prove to her that his failure to come was justified. There was no one easier to convince than Nastenka at a moment like this, or, rather, I should say that at a moment like this anyone is apt to listen gladly to any sort of consolation, and is extremely relieved if there is the faintest shadow of an excuse to be found.

"It's really funny, you know," I said, warming to my subject more and more, and glorying in the extraordinary

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

lucidity of my arguments. "He couldn't have possibly come! You've deceived and confused me, too, Nastenka, so much so that I've mixed up all the time factors. Just think a moment: the letter could have hardly reached him yet; supposing he can't come, supposing he's writing a reply, but then you wouldn't get it till tomorrow! I'll go and fetch it as early as can be tomorrow, and I'll let you know at once. Try to imagine the thousands of unexpected things that could have happened: what if he wasn't in when your letter arrived, and it may be that he hasn't even read it yet! After all, anything may have happened."

"Of course, of course!" Nastenka replied. "I never thought of it, I dare say anything may have happened." she went on in a most compliant tone which was marred, however, by a false note struck by some vague and contrary thought of hers. "Now this is what you must do," she said, "go there as early as you can tomorrow and if you find an answer, let me know at once. You know where I live, don't you?" And she told me her address again.

And then she suddenly became so sweet to me, so tender. She appeared to be listening intently to all I was saying to her, but when I put a direct question to her, she made no reply and turned her face away from me in embarrassment. I looked into her eyes—yes, that was it, she was crying.

"Oh dear me, dear me! What a baby you are! What childishness! Come now!"

She tried to smile, to pull herself together, but her chin quivered and her bosom still heaved.

"It's you I'm thinking of," she said after a pause. "You're so good, and only if my heart were made of stone would I be incapable of feeling it. D'you know what has occurred to me just now? I was comparing the two of you. Why isn't he—you? Why is he not like you? You are better than he is, even though I do love him more."

I made no reply at all. She seemed to be expecting me to say something.

"It may be, of course, that I do not quite understand him yet, that I do not know him well enough. You see, I think I've always been afraid of him, he was always so serious, so sort of proud. Of course I know he only looks

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

like that, there's more tenderness in his heart than in mine. I remember the way he looked at me that time I came to him with my bundle. But still, I think I have too much respect for him and that sounds as if we weren't equals, doesn't it?"

"No, Nastenka, no!" I replied. "It means that you love him more than anything in the world, and more than you love yourself."

"Yes, I suppose that's it," the simple-hearted girl agreed. "But you know what occurred to me now? Only this has nothing to do with him at all. I'm speaking generally: it has been on my mind for a long time. Now why can't we all be brothers? Why do even the best of people seem to be keeping something back, something secret from the others? Why not just put into words whatever you have in your heart, if you know you mean it? Yet everyone tries to look more forbidding than he really is, as though afraid it would be an insult to his feelings if they were displayed too soon."

"Ah Nastenka, it's true what you are saying, but there are many different reasons for it," I put in, curbing my own feelings more than ever at that moment.

"No, no," she cried, profoundly moved, "you, for one, are not like the others. I really don't know how best to tell you what I feel, but it seems to me that you, for one ... now, for instance ... it seems to me that you are sacrificing something for me," she added softly with a fleeting glance at me. "You must forgive my saying this to you, I am but a simple girl, I have not seen much of the world yet, and indeed I don't know how to say things sometimes," she said in a voice trembling with some secret emotion, which she tried to conceal with a smile. "But I just wanted to tell you how grateful I am to you, that I can feel all this too. Oh may you be blessed with happiness for this! And as for all those things you told me about your dreamer the other day, none of it is true, that is, I mean, it has nothing to do with you at all. You are recovering, you really are quite different from your description of yourself. If ever you come to love someone. I wish you every happiness with her. There's nothing I can wish her, for she will indeed be happy with you. I know,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

 Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

I'm a woman myself, and you must believe me if I say so."

She fell silent and pressed my hand warmly. In my excitement I could not say anything either. Several minutes passed.

"It's obvious he will not come tonight," she said at last, lifting her head. "It's late."

"He'll come tomorrow," I said in a most firm and convincing tone of voice.

"Yes," she added, brightening. "I can see it myself now—he'll only come tomorrow. Well, good-bye! Till tomorrow! If it rains I may not come. But the day after tomorrow I will, I'll come for certain, no matter what; and you be sure to come; I want you to, I'll tell you everything."

And as we were parting, she gave me her hand and said, looking at me candidly:

"We shall always be together now, shan't we?"

Oh Nastenka, Nastenka! If you only knew how lonely I am now!

When the clock struck nine I could bear my room no longer. I dressed and went out in spite of the rain. I went there and sat on our bench. I started down her alleyway, but I felt ashamed and came back without so much as a glance at her windows, turning away before I reached her home. I came back to my room in such despair as I had never known before. What a wet and dreary day! I would have wandered there all night if it hadn't been for the weather.

But till tomorrow! Till tomorrow! Tomorrow she'll tell me everything.

There was no letter today. But then there shouldn't have been. They are together now.

FOURTH NIGHT

Oh God, the way it all ended! The end of it all!

I came at nine o'clock. She was already there. I saw her when I was still some distance away: she stood leaning against the railing as on that first night, and she did not hear me approach her.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

 Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"Nastenka!" I called out, fighting down my excitement with an effort.

She turned round promptly.

"Well!" she said. "Give it to me quickly!"

I stood looking at her in bewilderment.

"Well, where's the letter? Have you brought the letter?" she repeated, clutching at the railing with one hand.

"No, I have no letter," I said at last. "Haven't you seen him yet?"

She turned dreadfully pale and stared at me fixedly for a long time. I had shattered her last hope.

"Oh well, let him be," she brought out at last in a breaking voice. "Let him be, if he wants to leave me like this."

She lowered her eyes, then she wanted to look into mine, but could not. She struggled to master her emotion a few minutes longer and then, abruptly, she turned away and, leaning on the railing, burst into tears.

"Come, come," I began, but I had not the strength to go on as I looked at her, and then what was there to say?

"Don't console me," she said through her tears. "Don't talk to me about him, don't tell me he'll come, don't tell me he has not abandoned me so cruelly, so inhumanly. But why? Why? Surely there was nothing in that letter of mine, that wretched letter, was there?"

She broke off, choking with sobs; my heart was wrung as I watched her.

"Oh how inhumanly cruel of him!" she began again. "And not a line, not a single line! At least he could have written that he did not want me any longer, that he was casting me off; but not a line in three whole days! How easy he finds it to insult and hurt a poor, defenceless girl, whose only fault is that she loves him! Oh what I have suffered in those three days! Oh my God, oh my God! When I remember that it was I who came to him that first time, that I humbled myself before him, weeping and begging him for love, if only for a tiny drop of love! And after all that!... Listen," she turned to me and her black eyes flashed, "it isn't so! It can't be so! It's absurd! One of us has made a mistake, either you or I; perhaps he hasn't received my letter yet? Perhaps he still knows

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

nothing about it? Because how can one—tell me for heaven's sake, judge for yourself, explain it to me for I cannot understand it—how can one treat anyone so brutally, so harshly as he has treated me? Not a single word! Even the most wretched of the wretched is shown more compassion. Perhaps he's heard something about me, perhaps someone's carried tales to him about me?" she cried, turning to me with her last question. "What do you think?"

"Look here, Nastenka, I'll go and speak to him tomorrow on your behalf."

"And then?"

"I'll ask him about everything. I'll tell him all."

"And what then?"

"You'll write him a letter. Do not say no, Nastenka, don't say no. I shall make him respect your gesture, he'll learn everything and if. . . ."

"No, my friend, no," she broke in. "Enough! Not a word, not one word from me, not a line—enough! I do not know him, I do not love him any more, I shall forget him. . ." she could not go on.

"Hush now, compose yourself, come sit down here, Nastenka!" I said as I helped her to the bench.

"But I am composed. Don't worry. It's nothing. These are just tears, they'll dry. Did you think I was going to end my life, to jump in the river?"

My heart was wrung; I wanted to speak but could not utter a word.

"Tell me," she continued, taking my hand in hers. "You would not have done this, would you? You would not have abandoned the one who came to you herself, you would not have flung into her face your brazen contempt for her poor, foolish heart? Wouldn't you have taken care of her? Wouldn't you have realised that she had been alone, that she did not know how it began, that she had not known how to protect herself from her love for you, that she was not to blame, that she was not at fault . . . that she had done nothing wrong! Oh God! Oh dear God!"

"Nastenka!" I cried, no longer master of my feelings. "Nastenka! You are tormenting me! You are breaking my heart, you are killing me, Nastenka! I cannot remain si-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

lent! I must speak, I must at last lay bare before you all that is overwhelming my heart!"

I rose from the bench as I said it. She took my hand and looked at me in wonder.

"What is it?" she spoke at last.

"Nastenka," I said with resolution, "listen to me, Nastenka! What I am about to tell you is nothing but a foolish, hopeless dream, it's all nonsensical. I know that it can never come true, but I cannot keep silent now. In the name of that which is making you suffer I entreat you to forgive me beforehand."

"But what is it?" she said, her eyes dry and fastened on mine with a strange light of curiosity and surprise in them. "What is it, what is the matter?"

"I know it's hopeless, but I love you, Nastenka! There you are! I've said it all now!" I said with a hopeless gesture.

"After this it's for you to judge whether you can go on talking to me the way you have done, and moreover, whether you can listen to what I am about to say to you."

"But why not?" Nastenka interrupted me. "What of it? Of course I've always known you cared for me, but I kept fancying you loved me differently, not in that way. Oh dear, oh dear!"

"It was like that at first, Nastenka, but now ... now I feel just as you felt when you went to him with your bundle. Worse than you felt, Nastenka, because he loved no other, and you do."

"What is it you're saying to me? I don't understand you at all. But listen, what is this for, or rather not what for, but why did you ... and so suddenly ... heavens! I'm talking nonsense! But you...."

And Nastenka grew utterly confused. Her cheeks flushed crimson, and she modestly averted her gaze.

"But what can I do, Nastenka, what can I do? I am at fault, I took ill advantage.... But no, I'm not, Nastenka; I can feel it, I can hear it, for my heart tells me I am right, for I could never hurt you or insult you! I was your friend; well, I'm still your friend; I have not betrayed a trust. See the tears flowing down my face, Nastenka? Let

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

them flow, let them, they do no harm! They'll dry, Nastenka."

"Oh sit down, do sit down," she said, pulling me down beside her. "Oh dear, oh dear!"

"No, Nastenka, I shall not sit down; I cannot remain here any longer, you are not to see me any more; I'll say everything and go. I only wanted to tell you that you would never have learned of my love. I would have kept my secret. I would never have thought of tormenting you at a moment like this with my selfishness. But it was more than I could bear; you started speaking of it yourself, it's your fault, you are to blame for everything, and not I. You cannot drive me away from you."

"But no, I'm not driving you away, no!" Nastenka said, doing her best to hide her confusion, the poor dear.

"You will not drive me away? No? And I was going to flee from you myself. I shall go away, but before I do I'll tell you everything, because when you were talking to me just now I could hardly contain myself, and when you were crying and tormenting yourself with the thought that you, well ... that you (forgive me mentioning it, Nastenka) were being cast off, that your love was being scorned, I felt, I knew there was so much love in my heart for you, Nastenka, so much love! And it grieved me bitterly that I could not help you with this love of mine ... it broke my heart and I, I could not hold my silence, I had to speak, Nastenka, I had to speak!"

"Yes, go on, speak to me, do speak to me like this!" Nastenka said with an indefinable emotion. "To you it may seem strange to hear me say this ... but speak, speak! I'll tell you afterwards! I'll tell you everything!"

"You are sorry for me, Nastenka, you're just sorry for me, my little friend! Well, what's done is done! You can't unsay what has been said. Isn't it so? You know everything now. So let this be our starting point. Very well, everything is splendid now! But do hear me out. When you were sitting there and crying, I thought to myself (do let me say what it was I thought), I thought that (well, of course it could never be, Nastenka), I thought that you ... I thought that somehow you, well, in quite a detached sort of way, did not love him any

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

more. And then—I was thinking about this last night, and the night before last, too, Nastenka—and then I'd do something, I would definitely do something to make you love me; you did tell me, you told me yourself, Nastenka, that you had almost come to love me. Well then, what was I going to say? Oh well, I think I've said it all; all I could tell you now is what it would have been if ever you loved me—only this and nothing more! Listen then, my dear friend—for after all you are my friend—I'm an ordinary man, of course, I'm poor and so insignificant, but that's not the point (I seem to be talking out of turn, but it's my shyness, Nastenka), the thing is that I'd love you so, I'd love you so that you would never feel the burden of my love in any way, even if you still cared and went on caring for the other man, whom I do not know. All you would ever be conscious of, all you would ever feel would be a heart beating constantly beside you, a grateful, ardent heart, that would belong to you for ever. Oh Nastenka! Nastenka! What have you done to me!"

"Please don't cry, I don't want you to cry," said Nastenka, quickly rising from the bench. "Come, get up, come with me, don't weep now, don't weep," she said, and wiped my tears with her handkerchief. "Well, come along now, I may have something to tell you. Now that he's abandoned me, now that he's forgotten me, though I love him still (I do not wish to deceive you) ... but tell me, answer me. If, for instance, if I came to love you, that is, if only.... Oh my friend, my friend! When I remember, when I think of the way I wounded you when I laughed at your love, when I praised you for not falling in love with me! Why didn't I foresee it, why didn't I? How foolish I must have been, but ... well, I've decided, I'll tell you everything."

"Wait, Nastenka, I think I should leave you in peace and go. I'm only tormenting you. Your conscience has begun to worry you because you laughed at me, and I do not wish it, no, I do not wish it, you have your own sorrow to bear ... it's my fault of course, Nastenka, goodbye!"

"Stop, listen to me; could you wait?"

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"Wait—what for?"

"I love him, but it will pass, it must pass, it cannot help passing; it's passing now, I can feel it ... who knows, perhaps it will be over this very night, because I hate him, because he treated me with scorn whereas you wept with me, you love me and that is why you have not cast me off as he has done, he never loved me, and then because I love you too ... yes, I do! I love you as you love me! I told you so before, you know I did—I love you because you are better than he is, because you are more honourable, because, because...."

Poor Nastenka, she was so overwhelmed, she could not go on, she leaned her head against my shoulder, then dropped it on my breast and wept disconsolately. I tried to comfort her, to soothe her, but she could not check her tears; she kept pressing my hand and repeating through her sobs, "One moment, one moment, I'll stop now! I want to tell you ... do not think these tears mean anything—I'm just crying from weakness, it'll be over in a moment." At last her sobbing ceased, she dried her tears and we walked on. I was about to speak, but she begged me to wait. We both lapsed into silence. At last she collected herself and began:

"Now then, please do not think that I am so inconstant and flighty in my affections," she said in a weak and shaky voice but with a sudden ring of something that plunged straight into my heart and throbbed there with a delicious ache. "Please do not think that I am capable of forgetting so easily and quickly, or of betraying.... I loved him for a whole year, and I swear to God that never, even in my thoughts, was I untrue to him. He scorned my loyalty, he mocked me—let him be! But he has wounded me, he has insulted my love. I ... I do not love him, for I can only love someone who is generous, understanding, and honourable, for this is what I'm like myself, and he is unworthy of me—well, let him be! He acted well, it would have been much worse if I were to be disappointed in him afterwards, when I had got to know him for what he was.... It is all over now! But who knows, my kind friend," she went on, closing her fingers around mine, "who knows, perhaps this very love of mine was a mirage, a play of

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

my imagination, perhaps it all began with naughtiness and nonsense because I was never allowed out of Grandmama's sight? Perhaps it is not him that I should love, perhaps another, a different man, one who would pity me and ... and.... No, let's leave it, let's leave it," Nastenka cut herself short abruptly, breathless with excitement. "I only wanted to say ... I wanted to tell you that if, in spite of my loving him (no, my having loved him), if, in spite of this, you say once more ... if you feel that your love is so great it can really drive the other from my heart ... if you want to take pity on me, if you do not wish to abandon me to my fate, alone, disconsolate, deprived of hope, if you want to love me for ever the way you love me now, I swear that my gratitude ... that my love will be worthy of yours. Will you take my hand, after this?"

"Nastenka!" I cried, my sobs choking me. "Nastenka! Oh Nastenka!"

"Enough, enough! It's enough, it's quite enough!" she spoke with an effort. "Everything has been said now, hasn't it? You are happy now, and so am I; not another word about it, not just yet, have mercy on me!... Do talk of something else, for heaven's sake!"

"Yes, Nastenka, of course! Enough of this, I'm happy now, I ... yes, let us talk of something else, Nastenka, let us find another topic quickly, yes! I'm ready...."

We couldn't find anything to talk about, we laughed, we cried, we said a thousand senseless, disconnected words; we walked up and down the embankment, or we suddenly retraced our steps and started across the road, we stopped and crossed back to the railing again; we were like two children.

"I live all by myself now, but tomorrow..." I began. "You know I'm poor, of course, Nastenka, all I have is a thousand two hundred a year, but that doesn't matter...."

"Of course it doesn't, and then Grandmama has her pension; she won't be a burden to us. We must take Grandmama."

"We must take Grandmama, of course ... but then there's Matryona...."

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"Oh yes, we've got our Fyokla, too!"

"Matryona is a good soul, her only fault is she has no imagination, no imagination whatsoever, Nastenka, but that doesn't matter."

"Never mind, they can both stay together, but you must move over to our house tomorrow."

"What do you mean? To your house? Very well, I'm willing."

"Yes, you'll lodge with us. We've got an attic, it's vacant now. We had an old lady, a gentlewoman, staying with us, but now she's moved, and Grandmama, I know, wants to let it to a young man. I said, 'Why a young man?' and she said, 'Simply because I'm getting on, but don't you imagine I'm trying to make a match for you, Nastenka! And so I knew at once that that was why."

"Ah Nastenka!"

And we both began to laugh.

"Stop now, stop! And where do you live?" she asked. "I forgot to ask you."

"Over there, near the bridge, in Barannikov's house."

"It's a great big house, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's a great big house."

"Oh I know, it's a fine house, but do leave it and move over to our place as soon as you can."

"As soon as it's morning Nastenka, as soon as it's tomorrow. I owe a bit of rent, but it doesn't matter. My salary is due shortly."

"You know, I might give lessons: that is, I'll study first and then I'll give lessons."

"Why, that's splendid . . . and I'll be getting my gratuity soon, Nastenka."

"So you will be my lodger tomorrow."

"Yes, and we'll go to the *Barber of Seville* because it'll soon be on again."

"Yes, let's," Nastenka said smiling. "But no, I'd rather we went to something else and not the *Barber*."

"Very well, let it be something else; that would be better of course, I'm sorry it never occurred to me."

Talking in this strain we wandered up and down as though we were intoxicated, in a daze it seemed, not knowing what was happening to us. We'd come to a spot and

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

pause there, talking for a long time, or we'd start off walking again and go heaven knows where, we'd laugh again, we'd weep again. Or Nastenka would suddenly want to go home, I dared not keep her but I would want to take her to her very doorstep; off we'd go, and then to our surprise, a quarter of an hour later, we'd find ourselves on the embankment again, sitting on our bench. Or suddenly she'd sigh and tears would glisten in her eyes again, and I'd lose heart, my blood would freeze. But the next moment she would be squeezing my hand, pulling me along with her, to walk again, to chat and talk.

"It's time now, it's really time I went home; it must be very late," Nastenka said at last. "We've been behaving like children long enough."

"True, Nastenka, but I'll never fall asleep now, I shan't go home at all."

"I don't think I'll be able to sleep either, but do take me home."

"Of course!"

"But this time, we really must go home."

"Of course we will."

"Promise? Because, after all, I must return home some time, you know."

"I promise," I replied, laughing.

"Well, come along."

"Let us go."

"Look at the sky, Nastenka, look! It will be a wonderful day tomorrow; look at the moon, look how blue the sky is! Look—that yellow cloud over there is creeping over the moon, look, look! But no, it has moved on. Look now, look!"

But Nastenka was not looking at the cloud, she stood rooted to the spot and said nothing; and then I felt her pressing timidly against me. I felt her hand tremble in mine; I looked at her. She leaned harder on my arm.

A young man walked past us. He stopped abruptly, peered at us, and walked on. My heart sank.

"Nastenka," I said softly, "who is it, Nastenka?"

"It's he," she whispered, clinging ever closer to me, ever more tremulously. My knees all but gave way.

"Nastenka! Nastenka! It's you!" we heard behind us,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

and in the same instant the young man made a few steps towards us.

Good God, the cry, the start she gave! The way she broke away from my arms and flew to him.... I stood and watched them utterly crushed. But she had barely given him her hand, had barely flung herself into his arms, when suddenly she turned to me, she was beside me again as swift as lightning, as the wind, and before I could gather my wits together, she had thrown her arms round my neck and kissed me hard and warmly. Then, without a word to me, she rushed to him again, took his hands in hers and drew him away with her.

I stood for a long time, watching them go. At last they both disappeared from view.

MORNING

Morning marked the end of my nights. It was a miserable day. Rain was falling, pattering sadly on my window; my little room was dark; the sky was overcast. My head ached and reeled; fever was creeping up my limbs.

"Here's a letter for you, sir, the postman's brought it, come through the post it has," Matryona said, standing over me.

"A letter? Who from?" I cried, jumping up from my chair.

"That I wouldn't know, sir, look and see, perhaps it says who it's from."

I broke the seal. It was from her!

"Oh forgive me, forgive me," Nastenka wrote. "I beg you on my bended knees to forgive me! I have deceived both myself and you. It was a dream, a phantom. My heart aches for you so today, forgive me, forgive me....

"Do not judge me severely for I have not changed towards you at all; I told you I would love you and I do love you, I more than love you! Oh God! If I could only love the two of you at once! If only you were he!"

"If only he were you!" the memory flashed through my mind.

I remembered your own words, Nastenka!

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"What wouldn't I do for you now, God knows it's true! I know you're sad and hurt. I have done you an injury, but you know one soon forgives a grievance if one loves. And you do love me!

"I thank you! I thank you for this love, for it is imprinted in my memory like a sweet dream which stays with you long after your awakening; for I shall always remember the moment when you, with such brotherly candour, opened your heart to me, and so generously accepted the gift of my own broken heart, to care for it, to cherish it and nurse it back to life. If you forgive me, my memory of you will be hallowed by my eternal gratitude to you, a feeling which will never be erased from my heart. I shall safeguard this memory, I shall remain true to it, I shall not betray it, I shall not be false to my heart, it is too constant. Only last night, how quickly it flew back to the one it belonged to for ever.

"We shall meet, you will come to see us, you will not forsake us, you will be my friend, my brother always. And when you see me you will give me your hand, won't you? You will give me your hand, you have forgiven me, haven't you? You do love me as before?

"Oh, do love me, do not forsake me, for I love you so at this moment, for I am worthy of your love, I want to be worthy of your love ... my dear, dear friend! I am to marry him next week. He came back, in love with me, he had never forgotten me. It will not anger you that I am writing about him. But I want to come to you with him, you will not refuse him your affection, will you?

"Forgive, remember and love your Nastenka."

I read this letter over and over again; I wanted to weep. The letter slipped from my fingers at last, and I buried my face in my hands.

"Dearie, I say, dearie," Matryona spoke.

"What is it?"

"Look, I've swept all the cobwebs away; it's fit for a wedding feast or a party, if you've a mind for one, it's that clean."

I looked at Matryona. She was still a hale and hearty "young" old woman, but all of a sudden, I don't know why, I fancied she was stopping and senile, her eyes were

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

lustreless and wrinkles creased her face. I don't know why, but suddenly it seemed to me that my room, too, had grown old like Matryona. The ceiling and the walls were tarnished, everything had become dingy and the cobwebs hung thicker than ever. I don't know why, but when I looked out of the window, I fancied that the house opposite had grown decrepit and dingy as well, that plaster had chipped from the pillars, the cornices were black and cracked, and the bright yellow walls were stained and piebald.

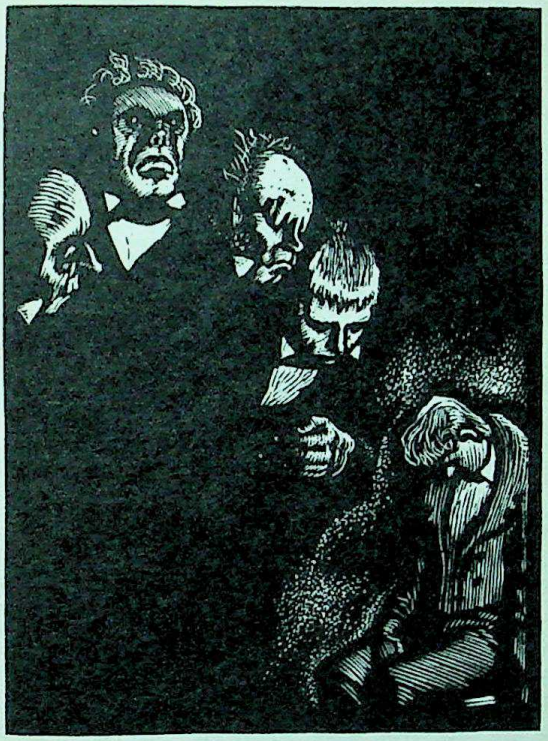
Perhaps it was because the ray of sunshine, peeping out so unexpectedly, had hidden behind the rain-cloud again, that everything seemed to grow dingy before my eyes once more; or perhaps it was because the vista of all my life to come stretched before me so bleakly and so sadly, and I saw myself the way I am now, exactly fifteen years hence, an aged man, in the same old room, as lonely as ever, with the same old Matryona, who had not grown any brighter with the years.

But that I should brood over my wrongs, Nastenka, never! That I should ever mar your pure and blissful happiness with a cloud of sorrow, that I should ever bring sadness into your heart with a bitter reproach, or wound it with secret pangs of conscience and make it contract painfully in a moment of rapture, that I should ever crush a single one of those exquisite flowers you wove into your dark curls when you walked to the altar with him.... Oh never! Never! Let your skies be always clear, let your sweet smile be bright and untroubled, may you for ever be blessed for that one moment of bliss and happiness you granted another, a lonely and grateful heart!

Good Lord! A whole minute of bliss! Why, isn't it enough, even for a lifetime?...

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu



A FAINT HEART

A Short Story

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Under the same roof, on the same fourth floor, in the same apartment, there lived two young colleagues—Arkady Ivanovich Nefedevich and Vasya Shumkov.... The author naturally feels he owes the reader an explanation why one of the heroes is called by his name and patronymic and the other simply Vasya, if only so that this latter form should not be deemed indecorous or unduly familiar. But then it would be necessary to begin by explaining and describing the rank, age, title, office, and even the peculiarities of the heroes' characters; and as there are many writers who are wont to begin in just such a manner, the author of the present story has resolved to start with action from the very outset, for the sole purpose of being different from the others (that is, because of his boundless vanity, as some perhaps will say). His foreword thus completed, he will begin.

Shumkov came home after five that evening, on New Year's Eve. Arkady Ivanovich, who was lying on his bed, woke up and squinted at his friend with half an eye. He saw that Vasya was wearing his perfectly cut civilian frock-coat and an immaculate shirt-front. This, of course, amazed him. "Now where could Vasya have been, dressed up like that? And he didn't come home for dinner, either!" Shumkov had, in the meantime, lighted a candle, and Arkady Ivanovich guessed at once that his friend was going to wake him up, accidentally, as it were. Indeed, Vasya cleared his throat twice, walked up and down the room once or twice, and finally, as he stopped in the corner by the stove to fill his pipe, he let it slip through his fingers on the floor, by sheer accident of course. Arkady Ivanovich chuckled inwardly.

"Vasya, you've been wily enough!"

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

"You're not asleep, Arkasha?"

"Really, I can't tell for certain, but it seems to me that I'm not."

"Oh Arkasha! Hello, old chap! Well, brother! Well, brother! You'll never guess what I'm about to tell you!"

"I'm sure I won't. I say, come here."

As if he had been expecting this, Vasya came up at once, though he was quite unprepared for any treachery on the part of Arkady Ivanovich. The latter gripped his hands very deftly, turned him round, pulled him down under and began to "strangle" his victim. This, evidently, gave Arkady Ivanovich, who loved a joke, an immense amount of pleasure.

"Got you!" he shouted. "Got you!"

"Arkasha! Arkasha! What are you doing! Let me go, for heaven's sake let me go! I'll mess up my frock-coat!"

"I don't care; what do you want a frock-coat for? Why are you so credulous that you let yourself be caught? Speak up, where have you been, where did you dine?"

"Arkasha, for heaven's sake, let me go!"

"Where did you dine?"

"But that's just what I want to tell you about!"

"Well, tell me."

"Let me go first."

"Oh no, I won't, I won't let you go until you've told me."

"Arkasha! Arkasha! Don't you see that I can't, that it's quite impossible!" cried Vasya, the feeble one, struggling to free himself from his foe's strong clutches. "There are certain subjects, you know. . . ."

"What subjects?"

"Well the kind that make you lose your dignity if you begin to talk of them the way we are now; it can't be done; it will sound funny, and this matter is not funny at all, it's very serious."

"Oh bother it if it's serious! What'll you think up next? Tell me something that'll make me laugh, that's what you've got to tell me; I don't want to hear anything that's serious; what sort of a friend would you be then? Answer me, what sort of a friend would you be, eh?"

"Arkasha, I swear I can't!"

"None of your excuses."

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"I say, Arkasha!" Vasya began, trying with all his might to put as much dignity as he could into his speech while he lay pinned down on the bed. "Arkasha! I think I'll tell you, but. . . ."

"Go on!"

"Well, I've proposed!"

Without another word, Arkady Ivanovich picked Vasya up in his arms like a child, in spite of the fact that Vasya was not a small man, but rather tall though lean, and began to walk up and down the room, carrying him with great ease and pretending he was rocking a baby.

"See if I don't swaddle you, you bridegroom you," he kept saying. However, when he saw that Vasya was lying motionless in his arms without uttering a word, Arkady sobered up at once, realising that he had carried his joke too far. He put his friend down in the middle of the room and kissed him on the cheek in a most sincere and friendly way.

"You're not angry, Vasya?"

"Arkasha, listen. . . ."

"Make up for New Year."

"I don't mind, you know; but why are you so crazy, you scapegrace you! I've told you often enough, Arkasha, honestly you're not being funny, not funny at all!"

"Well but you're not angry, are you?"

"Oh, I don't mind; who am I ever angry with? But now you've really hurt me, don't you see?"

"How have I hurt you? How?"

"I was coming to you like a friend, with my heart full, to unbosom myself to you, to tell you of my happiness."

"What happiness? Why don't you tell me about it then?"

"That proposed marriage of mine, you know," Vasya replied with resentment, for he was really somewhat infuriated.

"You! You getting married! Then you meant it?" Arkasha roared at the top of his voice. "No, really . . . why, how is that? And the way he says it, with tears streaming from his eyes! Vasya, Vasyuk my dear, my dearest boy, don't cry! You really mean it, do you?" and Arkady Ivanovich threw his arms round Vasya again.

"Now do you understand why I was so upset?" Vasya

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

said. "You are kind, you are my true friend, I know it. I came to you with my happiness, with this rapture in my soul, and suddenly I was forced to confess all the happiness in my heart, all this rapture, while struggling across the bed, losing my dignity. You do understand, Arkasha," Vasya continued with a half-laugh, "my position made it grotesque; but in a way I did not belong entirely to myself at that moment, I had not the right to make light of this matter, had I? It's a good thing you didn't ask me her name then, I swear I'd sooner have let you kill me than answer you!"

"But Vasya, why didn't you speak up? You should have told me everything earlier, and then I wouldn't have teased," Arkady Ivanovich cried in genuine despair.

"Oh come now, come! I just mentioned it. You know why I take it all so, don't you—it's because I have a kind heart. That's why it makes me so sad that I wasn't able to tell it the way I wanted to, to gladden you, to delight you, tell it properly, confess it to you decently. Really, Arkasha, I love you so, if it weren't for you I believe I wouldn't ever marry, or live in this world at all!"

Arkady Ivanovich, exceedingly sensitive by nature, listened to Vasya with tears and laughter both. Vasya was affected similarly. Once again they hugged each other and forgot their differences.

"Now, how did it happen? Tell me about it, Vasya! You must forgive me, old chap, but I'm really stunned, absolutely stunned; I'm quite thunderstruck, honestly! But no, old chap, no, you've made it up, I swear, you've made it up, you're fibbing!" Arkady Ivanovich cried and peered doubtingly into Vasya's face, but seeing in it a glowing confirmation of his resolve to marry as soon as possible, he threw himself upon his bed and started turning somersaults in his delight, so that the very walls shook.

"Vasya, come and sit here!" he shouted, his buoyancy stilled at last.

"I really don't know how to begin, old chap, how shall I begin?"

The two friends looked at each other in happy excitement.

"Who is she, Vasya?"

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"Artemyev . . ." uttered Vasya, his voice faint with joy. "No-o!"

"Oh but I used to talk and talk to you about them, and then I stopped, and you never noticed it. Oh Arkasha, the effort I had to make to conceal it from you; but I was afraid, afraid to put it into words! I was afraid everything would fall through, and I'm in love, you know, Arkasha! Oh, Lord! Oh, Lord! Now this is what happened," he went on to say, pausing and stammering in his agitation. "She had a fiancé a year ago, and all of a sudden he was sent off somewhere; I knew him too, he's really good riddance. Well then, he stopped writing altogether, he vanished completely. They waited and waited, wondering what it could mean. Suddenly, four months ago, he came back bringing a wife with him and never set foot in their house. How rude! How mean! But then there's no one to stand up for them. She wept and wept, poor girl, and there I went and fell in love with her . . . however, I've been in love with her for a long time, I've always been in love with her! And so I began to comfort her, I called and called . . . and then, I really don't know how it all came about, but she came to love me too; a week ago I felt I could contain myself no longer, I burst into tears, I wept and told her everything, that is, that I loved her—well, everything!. . . 'I am ready to love you too, Vasily Petrovich,' she said, 'but I am a poor girl, do not play me false; I do not even dare love anyone.' D'you see, Arkady? D'you see?. . . We became engaged right away; I thought and thought, I thought and thought; I said, 'How shall we tell your Mamma?' And she said, 'It is difficult now, we must wait a little; she is afraid, she may not let me marry you now'; and she cried too. And I, without consulting her, went and blurted it out to the old lady today. Lizanka fell on her knees before her, and so did I . . . and she gave us her blessing. Arkasha, Arkasha, my dearest friend! We shall all live together. No, I shall never part from you for anything in the world!"

"Vasya, no matter how I try I simply can't believe it, honestly I can't, I swear. Really, I keep fancying something. . . . Listen, how can it be that you are going to marry? How was it I didn't know, eh? I'll confess, Vasya,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

I was thinking of marrying too, old chap; but since you're going to, it doesn't matter! Well, I hope you'll be happy, very happy!"

"Oh Arkasha, I have such a light-hearted, such a delicious feeling now!" said Vasya, getting up and pacing excitedly up and down the room. "Isn't it true? Isn't it true? You do feel the same, don't you? We'll be poor, of course, but we'll be happy; and it's not a vain fancy either: our happiness is not taken out of a book, we shall really be happy, you know!"

"Vasya, listen, Vasya!"

"Yes?" Vasya said, stopping in front of Arkady.

"There's one thing I'm thinking of, but somehow I'm afraid of bringing it up.... You must forgive me, but please dispel my doubts for me. What are you going to live on? You know I'm delighted that you are to be married, of course, I'm delighted, I can hardly contain myself, but—what are you going to live on, tell me?"

"Oh goodness gracious, really, Arkasha!" Vasya replied, looking at Nefedevich in profound amazement. "What's the matter with you? The old woman herself didn't have to think twice when I had put it all clearly to her. How do you think they've been living? They've five hundred a year to keep the three of them, you know; that's all the pension they're receiving for the old man. There's Lizanka, the old woman and a small brother, whose school fees they're paying out of the same money, see how people manage? It's only capitalists like you and me, you know. Why think of it, sometimes if it's a good year, my income runs into as much as seven hundred!"

"I say, Vasya, please don't mind, I swear I mean it kindly, I'm only thinking how best not to spoil things for you, but what seven hundred? It's only three."

"Three! And what about Yulian Mastakovich? Forgotten him, have you?"

"Yulian Mastakovich indeed! But it's not a certain thing, you know, old chap! It's not like a fixed salary, where every ruble is like a true friend. Of course Yulian Mastakovich is, well, a great man, I respect him, I understand him even if his position is so high, and, upon my word, I like him, because he likes you and pays you for

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

your work, whereas he could have had a clerk appointed specially to him, instead of paying you the money, but you must see for yourself, Vasya.... And then again, I agree a handwriting as good as yours couldn't be found in the whole of St. Petersburg, I must concede it to you," Nefedevich concluded not without enthusiasm, "but what if, God forbid, you displeased him, what if he were dissatisfied with you, what if his business came to an end, what if he took on someone else, why, any number of things might happen! You know, Yulian Mastakovich may be here one day and gone the next, Vasya...."

"Look here, Arkasha, the way you put it the ceiling might cave in on us now."

"Yes, of course, of course. I was just talking."

"No, listen to me, hear me out, now you see, he couldn't part with me. No, just listen, listen to me. You know I carry out his orders zealously; he's so generous, you know, Arkasha, he gave me fifty silver rubles today!"

"Did he really, Vasya? Was it your gratuity?"

"No fear! It was out of his own pocket. He says, 'Here, you haven't been receiving any money for almost five months now; take it if you like; thank you,' he says, 'thank you, I'm pleased with you.' I give you my word! 'After all, you aren't working for me for nothing,' he says. Honestly! That's exactly what he said! Tears just poured down my face, Arkasha! Heavens above!"

"Tell me, Vasya, have you finished copying those papers?"

"No . . . I haven't yet."

"Oh Vasya! My angel! What have you done!"

"Look, Arkady, it doesn't matter, I've still two days. I'll finish."

"But why haven't you been doing it?"

"There you go, there you go! You look so crushed it wrings my soul and makes my heart ache! Oh well, you are always dampening my spirits like that. Screaming 'he-elp' right away! Just consider for a moment, has anything happened? Well, I'll finish it, I swear I will."

"And if you don't?" Arkady cried, jumping up. "And he's given you the money today! You're intending to marry too . . . oh my, oh my!"

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"Don't worry, don't worry," Shumkov shouted. "I'm settling down to it this very minute, don't worry!"

"How could you have neglected your duty so, Vasya my dear?"

"Oh Arkasha! How could I sit still? The state I was in! Why, I could hardly keep to my chair in the office; I could hardly contain my feelings, you know.... Goodness gracious! I'll sit up all night now, and tomorrow night, and the night after that and I'll finish it."

"Is there much left?"

"Don't bother me, for heaven's sake don't bother me, keep quiet."

Arkady Ivanovich tiptoed to his bed and sat down; then, suddenly, he sprang up only to sit down again, remembering that he might disturb Vasya, although his agitation was making it very hard for him to sit still, it was obvious that the news had quite overwhelmed him, and his first reaction of delight had not spent itself yet. He glanced at Shumkov, the latter glanced at him, smiling and shaking his finger at him, and then fixing his eyes upon his papers with a dreadful scowl (as if the whole success and productivity of his endeavours depended on it). It seemed that he, too, could not yet master his excitement, for he kept changing his pens, fidgeting about in his chair, altering his position, and taking up his writing again; but his hand shook and refused to obey him.

"Arkasha! I told them about you," he cried suddenly, as if he had only just remembered it.

"Have you?" Arkady cried. "And I was about to ask you that—well?"

"Oh yes, I'll tell you everything afterwards! See, it's my fault, honestly, it quite slipped my mind that I wasn't going to say anything until I'd written four pages, but then I suddenly remembered about you and about them. You know I don't seem able to write at all; I keep thinking of you...." Vasya smiled.

They lapsed into silence.

"Ugh, what a rotten pen!" cried Shumkov, striking the table with his pen in disgust, He picked up another one.

"Vasya! Listen! Just one word."

"What is it? Hurry up and let it be the last time."

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"Is there much left?"

"Oh dear!" Vasya winced as if there was nothing in this world more hateful and deadly than this question. "A lot, an awful lot!"

"You know, I have an idea."

"What?"

"Never mind, go on with your writing."

"But what is it? Tell me."

"It's after six now, Vasya old chap!"

Here Nefedevich smiled and gave Vasya a roguish wink that was at the same time somewhat timid, for he was not certain yet what Vasya's reaction to it would be.

"Well, what is it?" Vasya said, stopping his writing altogether, looking straight into Arkady's eyes and even growing pale in his impatience.

"D'you know what?"

"Oh for heaven's sake, what is it?"

"D'you know what? You're excited, you won't be able to do much ... wait, wait, wait—I know, I know—listen!" said Nefedevich, jumping up from his bed eagerly and interrupting Vasya, set upon dismissing any objections the latter might raise. "First of all you've got to calm down, you've got to pull yourself together, haven't you?"

"Arkasha! Arkasha!" Vasya cried as he sprang up from his chair. "I'll sit up all night, honestly I will!"

"Oh no, you won't! You'll only fall asleep towards morning."

"I shan't, I shan't fall asleep."

"No, that won't do, no; of course you'll fall asleep; yes, go to sleep at five. At eight I'll call you. It's a holiday tomorrow: you'll settle down and write all day ... and then the night and, by the way, is there much left for you to do?"

"Here, look! Look!"

Vasya, trembling with joy and anticipation, showed his notebook.

"Here!"

"I say, old chap, it's not much, you know."

"Arkasha dear, there's more," said Vasya, looking at Nefedevich very, very humbly, as if it rested with him whether Vasya would be allowed to go out or not.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

"How much more?"

"Two . . . little pages."

"Well then? Look here, we'll finish it on time, we will, truly!"

"Arkasha!"

"Vasya, listen! This is New Year's Eve, everyone's spending it with their friends and families, you and I are the only homeless, orphaned ones. Ah, Vasenka!" Nefedevich hugged Vasya and crushed him in his bear-like embrace.

"Arkady! That settles it!"

"Vasyuk, I was just going to say it. You see, Vasyuk, you clumsy old thing! Listen, listen! You know. . . ."

Arkady paused with gaping mouth, deprived of speech for joy. Vasya held him by the shoulders, stared into his eyes and moved his lips as if he wanted to finish the sentence for him.

"Well?" Vasya said at last.

"Present me to them today!"

"Arkady, let's go there to tea! D'you know what? We won't even stay to see the New Year in, you know, we'll leave earlier," Vasya cried with real animation.

"That means two hours, no more, no less!"

"And then we part until after I've finished."

"Vasyuk!"

"Arkady!"

It took Arkady just three minutes to change into his frock-coat. Vasya only tidied himself up, because in his zeal to settle down to work he had quite forgotten to take his frock-coat off when he came home.

They hurried out into the street, one feeling happier than the other. Their way lay from the Petersburg Side to Kolomna. Arkady Ivanovich's stride was brisk and energetic, his very walk making it obvious how delighted he was in Vasya's good fortune and his ever mounting happiness. Vasya trotted along with shorter steps, but his bearing was not undignified; quite the contrary, he had never appeared in a more favourable light to Arkady Ivanovich. At that moment, Arkady Ivanovich actually experienced a deeper respect for him, and Vasya's physical defect, of which the reader does not yet know—Vasya was

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

a little lop-sided—which always aroused deep-felt and fond compassion in Arkady's kind heart, now moved him to increasingly tender affection, which Vasya naturally well deserved. Indeed, Arkady Ivanovich was ready to weep for joy, but he controlled himself.

"Where are you going, Vasya? It's nearer this way!" he cried, seeing that Vasya was about to turn down Voznesensky Prospekt.

"Shut up, Arkasha, shut up!"

"But it's really nearer this way, Vasya!"

"Arkasha! D'you know what?" Vasya began with an air of mystery, his voice faint with happiness. "D'you know what? I'd like to give Lizanka a little present."

"What will it be?"

"There's a wonderful shop, Madame Laroux's, on the corner here."

"Really!"

"A bonnet, old chap, a bonnet; I saw such a sweet little bonnet today; I inquired: they say the style is called Manon Lescaut—it's heavenly! It's got cerise ribbons, and if it's not too expensive . . . Arkasha, even if it is expensive!"

"You're the greatest poet of all, Vasya, I do declare! Come along then."

They quickened their pace to a run, and two minutes later they entered the shop. They were met by a dark-eyed Frenchwoman, with her hair dressed in curls, who instantly, after her very first glance at the customers, became as merry and happy as they were, even happier if that were possible. Vasya was ready to kiss Mme Laroux in his delight.

"Arkasha!" he said in an undertone, glancing in a casual way at all the beautiful and gorgeous things displayed upon little wooden stands on the shop's huge table. "Wonders! The beauty of it all, the beauty! Look at that bit of sweetness over there, for instance, see it?" he whispered, indicating a very pretty bonnet, but not at all the one he wanted to buy, for he had already made his choice from afar, and now he fastened his admiring gaze on *the* bonnet, the unsurpassable bonnet, displayed on the other end of the table. The way he stared would make one think

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

that someone was about to steal it, or that the bonnet itself might fly into the air, simply to elude him.

"That one," said Arkady Ivanovich, indicating another bonnet, "that one is the best, I think."

"Good for you, Arkasha! All the honour to you for it; truly, I'm beginning to feel an extraordinary respect for your taste," said Vasya, mischievously pretending to be sincerely moved by Arkasha's choice. "Your bonnet is charming, but come here, will you!"

"Is there a better one, old man?"

"Take a look at this one!"

"That one?" said Arkady doubtfully.

But when Vasya, unable to restrain himself any longer, snatched it off the stand, from which it seemed to fly of its own volition as though welcoming such a good buyer after its long wait, and when all its ruches, bows, and laces began to rustle, a sudden cry of admiration burst forth from Arkady Ivanovich's powerful chest. Even Mme Laroux who, maintaining her unquestionable supremacy and excellence in the matter of taste, had remained silent from sheer condescension while the choice of bonnets was under way, now rewarded Vasya with a radiant smile of approval, and everything about her—her look, her gesture and her smile—all said, "Yes! You have guessed it and you deserve the happiness awaiting you."

"You were just being coy, weren't you now?" Vasya cried, all his affection now centred upon the charming bonnet. "You've been hiding on purpose, you little rascal, you darling!" And he kissed it, or rather the air that surrounded it, for he was afraid of touching his treasure.

"Thus true worth and virtue conceals itself," added Arkady delightedly, humourously repeating a sentence he had read that morning in one witty newspaper. "Well, Vasya, what now?"

"Arkasha! Hurrah! Why, you're witty too, today, you'll cause a *furore*, as they call it, among the ladies, mark my words. Mme Laroux! Mme Laroux!"

"What can I do for you?"

"Dear Madame Laroux!"

Mme Laroux glanced at Arkady Ivanovich and smiled indulgently.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"You can't imagine how I adore you at this moment . . . allow me to kiss you . . ." and Vasya kissed the shopkeeper.

She certainly had to summon all her poise for a moment so as not to lose her dignity with a scamp like Vasya. But I assert that it was Mme Laroux's innate, genuine affability and graciousness that prompted her to receive his ecstatic impulse the way she did. She forgave him, and how clever, how graceful was the attitude she adopted in this case! Could one be really angry with Vasya!

"Mme Laroux, what is the price?"

"Five silver rubles," she answered with a smile, her calm restored.

"And that one, Mme Laroux?" asked Arkady Ivanovich, pointing to his choice.

"That one is eight silver rubles."

"Oh but I say! I say! Why, you must agree, Mme Laroux, you must say which one is better, daintier, and sweeter, which one is more your style?"

"That one is costlier, but your choice *c'est plus coquet.*"

"Well then, that is the one we are taking!"

Mme Laroux took a sheet of very, very thin paper, wrapped the bonnet in it, and secured it, with a little pin. This seemed to make the paper even lighter and finer than it had been without the bonnet. Vasya picked it all up carefully, scarcely breathing, bowed to Mme Laroux, complimented her, and walked out of the shop.

"I'm a *viveur*, Arkasha, I'm born to be a *viveur*!" cried Vasya, breaking into a short, soundless, nervous laugh as he hurried along, giving a wide berth to the passers-by, suspecting one and all of deliberate intent to crush his precious bonnet.

"Listen, Arkady, listen!" he began a minute later, and there was a ring of something solemn, something unutterably loving in his voice. "Arkady, I'm so happy, so happy!"

"Vasenka! And I, I'm so happy, my dear boy!"

"No, Arkasha, no, your love for me is boundless, I know; but you cannot sense even a hundredth part of what I feel just now! My heart is so full, Arkasha, so full! I am unworthy of this happiness! I can hear it, I can feel it! What have I ever done to deserve it," he said in a voice that shook with suppressed sobs. "What have I done, tell

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

 Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

me! Look at all the people, look how much sorrow there is, how many tears, how many humdrum days with never a holiday! And I! I am loved by such a girl, I . . . but you will see her for yourself, you will appreciate that noble heart of hers yourself. I am of low birth, but now I have a rank and an independent income—my salary, that is. I was born with a physical defect—my shoulders are slightly crooked. But look, she loves me as I am. And Yulian Mastakovich, too, was so nice, so considerate, so polite to me today. He seldom talks to me; he came up and said, 'Well, Vasya' (honestly, that's what he called me, just Vasya), 'going on the spree during the holidays, eh?' and he laughed. 'It's like this, Your Excellency,' I said, 'I have some work to do,' and then I plucked up courage and said, 'and perhaps I'll have a little pleasure, too, Your Excellency,'—I swear I said it. And then he gave me the money and added another word or two. I wept, honestly I was reduced to tears, and I think he was moved, too, he patted me on the shoulder and said, 'That's the way, Vasya, you should always feel like this.' "

For a second Vasya paused; Arkady Ivanovich turned away and wiped a tear with his fist.

"And then, and then . . ." Vasya went on, "I have never said this to you before, Arkady . . . Arkady! You make me so happy with your friendship, I wouldn't be alive at all if it weren't for you—no, no, don't say a word, Arkasha! Let me shake your hand, let me thank you!" and again Vasya was unable to go on.

Arkady Ivanovich wanted to hug Vasya then and there as they were crossing the street but suddenly a shrill cry of "hey—look out!" rang practically in their ears, and, frightened, they ran to the safety of the pavement. This was rather a relief to Arkady Ivanovich. He ascribed Vasya's gushing avowals of gratitude to nothing but the singularity of the present moment. As for himself, he was chagrined. He felt that so far he had done so little for Vasya! He actually felt ashamed of himself when Vasya began to thank him for the little he had done. But then there was a whole lifetime ahead, and Arkady Ivanovich breathed easier.

Their hostesses had indeed given up waiting for them!

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

There was the proof—they were already having tea. But truly, an elderly soul is shrewder at times than a young one, and what a young one at that! Because Lizanka had insisted quite earnestly that he would not come: "He isn't coming, Mamma, I can feel it in my heart he isn't"; while her mamma kept saying that her heart was telling her quite the opposite, that he was sure to come, that he wouldn't be able to stay away, that he would come running, that no one had any office duties at that hour, on New Year's Eve, too! And when Lizanka went to open the front door, even then she did not expect to see them—she could not believe her eyes, she was breathless, her heart fluttered suddenly like a captured little bird's, she blushed all over, she grew red like a cherry, which she resembled awfully. Good Lord, what a surprise! What a joyful "Oh!" escaped her lips! "You faithless one! You darling!" she cried, flinging her arms around Vasya's neck. But imagine her amazement, all her sudden embarrassment: directly behind Vasya, as if trying to hide behind his back, stood Arkady Ivanovich looking slightly abashed. It must be admitted that he was indeed awkward with women, very awkward, it even happened once that. . . . But of that anon. However, you must consider his position too: there was nothing to laugh at; there he stood in the hall, in his galoshes, his topcoat and fur cap, which he made haste to pull off, bundled up in a most horrible way in the meanest of yellow knitted mufflers, knotted behind for greater effect. All this had to be unwound, removed as quickly as possible, so that he could appear in a more favourable light, for there is no one in the world who does not wish to present himself in the most favourable light. And then Vasya, annoying, impossible, though of course the same dear, kind Vasya, but really an impossible, pitiless Vasya, cried, "Here, Lizanka, here's my Arkady for you! What d'you think of him, eh? This is my best friend, embrace and kiss him, Lizanka, give him a kiss in advance, when you know him better you'll want to kiss him yourself." Well then? Well then, I'm asking you, what could Arkady Ivanovich do? And so far he had only managed to unwind half the length of his muffler! Truly, sometimes I feel actually ashamed of Vasya's excessive enthusiasm; it

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

shows that he's kind-hearted, of course, but ... it's embarrassing, it's unnecessary!

At last they both entered. The old lady was overjoyed to make the acquaintance of Arkady Ivanovich: she had heard so much about him.... But she did not finish. A happy "Oh" which rang out in the room, made her break off in the middle of a sentence. Oh joy! Lizanka was standing before the bonnet so unexpectedly revealed by the wrapping, her pretty hands clasped most naïvely, and her lips smiling, smiling so.... Oh my goodness, why couldn't Mme Laroux have had an even better bonnet to offer!

But, good Lord, where could you find a better bonnet? That's really too much! Where will you find a better one? I mean it quite seriously. And I should even say that this lovers' ingratitude makes me quite indignant, it actually grieves me a little. But look for yourselves, look, what could be better than this darling of a bonnet? Do look.... But no, no, my complaints are uncalled for: they all agree with me now; it was nothing but a momentary delusion, a daze, a fever of emotion; I am willing to forgive them. But then look ... you must forgive me, I'm still on the subject of the bonnet; it's a tulle one, feather-light, a wide cerise ribbon, draped with lace, set in between the crown and the ruching, with two ends of the ribbon, long and wide, coming down at the back; they'll fall on the neck, a little lower than the nape.... Only the bonnet itself has to be worn further back on the head; do look; do look and tell me now.... Oh but I see, you're not looking!... You don't seem to care! You're gazing in another direction. You are watching two great, pearl-like teardrops suddenly gather in a pair of coal-black eyes, quiver a moment on the long eyelashes, and then drop into the airy froth which, rather than tulle, is what Mme Laroux's work of art is made of.... And I fell aggrieved again: it's almost as if the tears were not quite for the bonnet!... Oh no! In my opinion, a thing like that should be given in cold blood. Only then can it be duly appreciated. I'm all for the bonnet, I must confess!

They sat down—Vasya next to Lizanka, and the old lady next to Arkady Ivanovich; they conversed and Arkady Ivanovich acquitted himself well. I gladly give him

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

the credit. Indeed, I hardly expected it of him. After a word or two about Vasya, he managed to turn the conversation most adroitly to Yulian Mastakovich, his benefactor. And he spoke so cleverly, that in truth, the subject did not wear thin in a whole hour. The wisdom, the tact with which Arkady Ivanovich touched upon certain of his peculiarities, which directly or indirectly concerned Vasya, was worth watching. But then the old lady was charmed, truly charmed; she herself admitted it, she made a point of calling Vasya aside and telling him that his friend was a splendid, a most courteous young man, and what was more, such a serious, sedate young man. Vasya all but burst out laughing with the blessedness of it all. He remembered how the sedate Arkasha had wrestled with him on the bed not half an hour ago! The old lady then made a sign to Vasya and told him to follow her quietly and stealthily into the other room. It must be said that she was acting a little meanly towards Lizanka: she was betraying her trust from the fullness of her heart, of course, when she let Vasya steal a look at the gift which Lizanka was making him for New Year. This was a wallet, embroidered with beads and gold thread, and beautifully designed: there was a deer on one side, a very lifelike deer, running very swiftly and so naturally, so well! The other side portrayed a well-known general, perfectly done too, and finished off to quite a good likeness. There's no need for me to speak of Vasya's delight. Meanwhile, the moment was not wasted in the sitting-room either. Lizanka straightaway approached Arkady Ivanovich. She took both his hands in hers, she thanked him for something and finally Arkady Ivanovich understood that the matter concerned the very same precious Vasya. Indeed, Lizanka was deeply moved: she had heard that Arkady Ivanovich was such a true friend to her betrothed, that he was so fond of him, watched over him so, guided him at every step with salutary advice, that really, she, Lizanka, could not but thank him, could not contain her feeling of gratitude, and hoped that Arkady Ivanovich would grow to love her too, if only half as much as he loved Vasya. Then she went on to ask him whether Vasya was taking good care of his health, she voiced certain misgivings

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

about his peculiarly excitable temper, his imperfect knowledge of people and life, and said that she would look after him religiously, she would cherish him and watch over his destiny, and that she hoped Arkady Ivanovich, far from abandoning them, would even make his home with them.

"The three of us will be like one!" she cried in very naïve elation.

But it was time they left. They were of course urged to stay, but Vasya declared quite firmly that they could not. Arkady Ivanovich seconded his avowal. They were naturally asked why, and it was immediately disclosed that there was a piece of work entrusted to Vasya by Yulian Mastakovich, an urgent, important, and horrible job, which had to be submitted the day after tomorrow in the morning, and that far from being finished, it was hopelessly behindhand. Mamma gasped when she heard of this, while Lizanka was frankly upset and alarmed and actually drove Vasya away. Their parting kiss did not suffer for it at all: it was shorter and swifter, but for all that—warmer and harder.

They parted at last, and the two friends hastened home.

The minute they found themselves out in the street, they began with one accord to confide their impressions to each other. But this was as it should be: Arkady Ivanovich was in love, head over heels in love with Lizanka! And who was a better confidant for this than Vasya, the luckiest of mortals himself? That was what he did: without a qualm he instantly confessed it all to Vasya. Vasya thought it terribly amusing and was awfully glad, and even remarked that it was all for the better, that now they'd be closer friends than ever. "You've read my thoughts, Vasya," Arkady Ivanovich said. "Yes! I love her as I love you! She will be my guardian angel as well as yours, for your happiness will shed a radiance upon me too, and warm me with its rays. She will be mistress of my fate too, Vasya: my happiness will be in her hands, let her command both you and me alike. Yes, my friendship for you is my friendship for her. You two are inseparable for me now; only now I shall have two beings like you instead of one. . . ." Arkady broke off, overwhelmed

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

with emotion, while Vasya was shaken to the depths of his soul by his friend's words. Never had he expected to hear words like these from Arkady! He was not an eloquent speaker at all, neither was he fond of dreaming; and yet now he instantly began to weave the gayest, the brightest, and the most blissful of day-dreams! "Oh, how I'll look after you both, how I shall cherish you," he spoke again. "First of all, Vasya, I shall stand godfather to all your children, every single one of them, and secondly, Vasya, we've got to think of the future. We must buy some furniture, rent a flat, so that she and you and I should all have our private cubby-holes. You know, Vasya, I'll go and take a look at the 'To Let' signs tomorrow. Three ... no, two rooms, we don't need more. Come to think of it, I was talking nonsense earlier today, Vasya, we'll have enough money, never fear! The minute I glanced into her pretty eyes I knew at once that we'd have enough. Everything for her! Phew, how hard we'll work! Now, Vasya, we can risk it and rent a flat for, say, twenty-five rubles. A flat means everything, old chap! In good rooms ... you know, a man feels light-hearted and his dreams are blissful! And secondly, Lizanka will be our common treasurer, not a kopek wasted! D'you think I'd ever drop into a bar now? What do you take me for? Not on your life! And then we'll get a raise, we'll receive gratuities, because we'll work with zeal. My, how hard we'll work! We'll plough through it like oxen! Just think now," and Arkady Ivanovich's voice grew faint with rapture, "a sudden windfall of some twenty-five or thirty rubles!... You know every gratuity will mean a bonnet, or a scarf, or stockings, or something! She simply must knit me a muffler, look how wretched mine is—yellow, disgusting, the unpleasantness it caused me today! And you're a good one, too, Vasya, presenting me while I stood with that yoke on my neck ... but that's not the point at all! It's this: you see, I'm taking it upon myself to provide all the flat silver! I'm bound to make you a little gift, you know, it's an honour, it's a question of self-esteem! My gratuity won't run away from me, will it, they wouldn't give it to Skorokhodov instead; no chance of the money going stale in that bird's pocket! Look here, I'll buy you some silver

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

spoons and some good knives—not silver ones, but the very best knives, and a waistcoat, that is the waistcoat is for me, I'll be your best man, you know! Only you've got to try hard now, take hold of yourself, I'll stand over you with a stick tonight and tomorrow night, all night long, I'll work you to death, but you must finish it! Get it finished quickly! And then we'll go out for the evening again, and we'll both be happy. We'll take a fling at lotto! We'll sit together of an evening—my, what fun! Oh bother, what a pity I can't be a help to you. I'd gladly sit down and write it all, all of it for you. Why don't you and I write the same hand?"

"Yes," said Vasya, "yes, I must hurry. It must be about eleven now, I think. I must hurry.... To work!" and saying this, Vasya, who all this time had either been smiling or breaking into this effusion of good-will with some eager remark and, in short, had been displaying the most wholehearted animation, suddenly grew subdued and silent, and started down the street almost at a run. It seemed that some oppressive thought had suddenly turned his flaming mind to ice, and his heart had suddenly cringed.

It quite worried Arkady Ivanovich: his anxious questions elicited hardly any replies from Vasya, who only tossed back a word or two, or an exclamation which was often irrelevant.

"But, Vasya, what's wrong with you?" he shouted at last, barely managing to keep up with Vasya. "Can it be worrying you so?"

"Oh stop babbling, there's a good chap," Vasya replied in some annoyance.

"Come, Vasya, don't lose heart," Arkady broke in, "why, I've seen you write much more in a shorter time ... why worry? You've just got a gift for it! If it comes to that, you can even try and write faster. They're not going to have it lithographed for calligraphy books you know! You'll manage! The only thing is you're excited and preoccupied now, and the work will go slower for it."

Vasya muttered something under his breath, and the two ran home in nervous haste.

Vasya sat down to his work at once. Arkady Ivanovich, his excitement subdued, quietly undressed and lay

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

down on his bed, keeping his eyes fixed on Vasya all the while. A strange fear took possession of him. "What's the matter with him?" he asked himself as he watched Vasya's blanched face, his glittering eyes and the anxiety which showed in his every gesture. "His hand is shaking too . . . oh bother, really! Perhaps I should advise him to go to bed for an hour or two? At least he'd sleep off his agitation." Vasya had just then finished a page and, raising his eyes, glanced at Arkady, but he dropped his eyes at once and picked up his pen again.

"I say, Vasya," Arkady Ivanovich said all of a sudden. "Wouldn't it be better if you had a little nap? Look, you're quite feverish."

Vasya looked at Arkady with annoyance, even anger, and made no reply.

"Listen Vasya, what are you doing to yourself?"

Vasya responded at once.

"Maybe we should have some tea, Arkasha?" he said.

"Why? What for?"

"It will brace me up. I don't want to sleep, no, I shan't sleep! I'll keep on writing. I'd rest a little at tea, and things would go easier."

"Smart of you, Vasya old chap, marvellous! You said the very words: I was going to suggest that you take a rest. But why didn't I think of the tea myself? Only you know what? Mavra won't get up, she won't wake up for anything."

"Hm."

"Rubbish! Never mind!" cried Arkady Ivanovich, jumping down from his bed in his bare feet. "I'll put the samovar on myself. It won't be the first time, will it?"

Arkady Ivanovich hurried to the kitchen and busied himself with the samovar. In the meantime Vasya kept on writing. Arkady Ivanovich went so far as to dress and run to the baker's shop, so that Vasya could fortify himself for the night's work. A quarter of an hour later the samovar was on the table. They sat down to tea, but conversation flagged. Vasya was still preoccupied.

"I must go the rounds and pay my New Year respects tomorrow. . ." Vasya said at last, as though recalling himself to the present.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

"You needn't go at all."

"No, old chap, I must," said Vasya.

"But I'll sign your name for you everywhere ... why should you go? You'd better do your work tomorrow. I told you you ought to stay up till about five in the morning, and then you could go to sleep. Think what a sight you'll look if you don't! I'd rouse you at eight sharp."

"But will it be all right for you to sign my name?" said Vasya, half-inclined to agree.

"Why not? Everyone does it!"

"I'm afraid, really."

"But what are you afraid of? What?"

"It doesn't matter with the others, you know, but Yulian Mastakovich, he's my benefactor, Arkasha. What if he notices it's a different hand?"

"He'd notice! Bah! You are a one, Vasyuk! How could he possibly notice it? Don't you know I can sign your name ever so well and I make the same curlicue, honestly I do! Come now, how could anyone know the difference?"

Vasya said nothing and hurried through his tea.... Then he shook his head in doubt.

"Vasya, my dear! Oh if we can only do it! Vasya, but what is it? You're really frightening me! D'you know I shan't go to bed now, Vasya, I shan't go to sleep. Show me, is there much left?"

Vasya gave him such a glare that Arkady Ivanovich's heart sank and he could not go on with what he had meant to say.

"Vasya! What is the matter? What is it? Why do you look like that?"

"Arkady, I really think I'll go and pay my respects to Yulian Mastakovich tomorrow."

"Well, perhaps you should," Arkady said, staring at him in an agony of suspense. "Listen, Vasya, write faster; I wouldn't advise you ill. I swear I wouldn't! Remember how often Yulian Mastakovich himself said that the thing he liked best about your penmanship was its legibility. It's only Skoroplyokhin, you know, who wants it to be distinct and beautiful as well, like a calligraphy book, so he might pinch the paper somehow afterwards and take it home for his children to copy; as if he couldn't buy them some

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

copybooks, the fool! And as for Yulian Mastakovich, all he says, all he demands is: legibility, legibility and legibility! What more do you want? Really, Vasya, I don't know how to talk to you any more.... I'm becoming frightened.... You're killing me with your despondency."

"Never mind, never mind!" Vasya uttered, and fell back in his chair in exhaustion. Arkady was alarmed.

"D'you want some water? Vasya! Vasya!"

"Don't worry, don't," Vasya said, pressing his hand. "I'm all right; I only felt a sort of sadness, Arkady. I can't even tell why. Listen, do talk of something else, don't remind me...."

"Compose yourself, for heaven's sake compose yourself, Vasya! You'll finish it, honestly you will! And even if you don't, what matter? It's not a crime, you know!"

"Arkady," said Vasya with a look so wrought with meaning that Arkady felt positively frightened, for never before had Vasya been so dreadfully upset. "If I were alone, as before.... No, that's not what I wanted to say. I keep wanting to tell you, to confide in you like a friend. However, why should I worry you? You see, Arkady, some are capable of great things, and others do their little bit like me. Now supposing you were expected to show gratitude and appreciation and you were unable to do it?"

"Vasya! I don't understand you at all!"

"I've never been ungrateful," Vasya continued softly, as though deliberating with his own self. "But if I cannot express all I feel, it's as if ... it will seem that I'm really ungrateful, Arkady, and it's killing me!"

"Oh come, come! Surely all your gratitude does not hinge on whether you finish your work on time or not? Think what you're saying, Vasya! Is that the only proof of gratitude?"

Vasya said no more and suddenly gave Arkady a clear-eyed stare, as if all his doubts had been dispelled by this unexpected reasoning. He even smiled, but instantly assumed the same pensive expression again. Arkady was quite overjoyed, interpreting this smile as the end of all his fears, and the anxious expression that reappeared on Vasya's face as his determination to take the better course.

"Well, Arkasha, when you wake up take a look at me,"

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Vasya said, "there'll be the devil to pay if I fall asleep; and now I'll settle down to work.... Arkasha?"

"Yes?"

"No, it's nothing, I only wanted ... I wanted...."

Vasya sat down and said no more. Arkady went to bed. Neither of them uttered a word about their visit of Kolomna. It may be that both of them felt slightly guilty, aware that their little spree had been untimely. Arkady Ivanovich soon fell asleep, still grieving over Vasya. To his surprise he awoke when it was just past seven. Vasya was asleep in his chair, pen in hand, looking pale and exhausted; the candle had burnt out. Mavra could be heard fussing with the samovar in the kitchen.

"Vasya! Vasya!" Arkady shouted in alarm. "When did you go to sleep?"

Vasya opened his eyes and jumped up.

"Goodness!" he gasped. "I dropped off in my chair!"

He pounced on his papers at once—they were in order; there was neither ink nor candle grease blots on them.

"I suppose I must have dropped off at about six," Vasya said. "How cold it is at night! Let's have some tea and then I'll resume."

"Do you feel better now?"

"Yes, yes, I'm all right, I'm all right...."

"Happy New Year, Vasya old chap!"

"Happy New Year, my dear!"

They embraced. Vasya's chin quivered and tears rose to his eyes. Arkady Ivanovich was silent; he was feeling sad; they hurried through their tea....

"Arkady! I've made up my mind, I'll go to Yulian Mastakovich myself."

"But he won't notice, you know."

"My conscience won't let me be, old chap."

"But it's for him you're sitting here, it's for him you're worrying yourself sick ... come now! You know, old chap, I'll drop in there today."

"Where?" Vasya asked.

"The Artemyevs. I'll wish them a happy New Year from both of us."

"Oh my dearest friend! Very well, I'll stay here; I see now that you were right; after all I'm busy working. I'm

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

not just idling my time away! Wait a moment, I'll quickly write a note."

"Go ahead, you've got plenty of time, you needn't hurry. I still have to wash and shave and brush my coat. Well, Vasya old chap, we are going to be pleased and happy! Embrace me, Vasya!"

"Oh if only. . . ."

"Does Mr. Shumkov live here?" a child's voice sounded from the staircase.

"He does, dearie, he does," Mavra said as she admitted the visitor.

"Who's that? What is it?" cried Vasya, leaping from his chair, and dashing into the hall. "Petenka, you!"

"Good morning. I have the honour of wishing you a happy New Year, Vasily Petrovich," said a pretty little boy of ten or so, with his dark hair done up in ringlets. "Sister sends you her regards and Mamma too, and sister told me to kiss you for her."

Vasya swung the messenger up into the air and planted a long, honeyed and ecstatic kiss on his lips, which were so very much like Lizanka's.

"Kiss him, Arkady!" he said, handing Petya over to Arkady, and the boy, without touching the floor, passed on into the powerful and eager arms of Arkady Ivanovich.

"Oh you darling boy, would you like some tea?"

"Thank you kindly. We've had tea already. We got up early today. They've gone to morning service. Sister spent two hours curling my hair and pomading it, washing my face and mending my trousers because I tore them yesterday playing in the street with Sashka; we were playing snowballs."

"Well, well, well!"

"And she dressed me up to go and call on you, and then she pomaded my hair, and then she kissed me to death and said, 'Go and see Vasya, wish him a happy New Year, ask him if he's happy, if he slept well. . .' there was something else she told me to ask you—oh yes, if you've finished the work you were so . . . how did she say it . . . oh, here we are, I've got it written down here," said the boy, and read from a piece of paper he took out of his pocket, "yes, anxious about".

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"It will be finished! It will! Just tell her so: it will, I'll definitely finish it, my word of honour!"

"Yes and ... oh! I'd almost forgotten. Sister sent you a little note and a present, and I went and forgot all about it!"

"Good Lord! Oh you darling boy! Where ... where is it? Here we are! Look what she's written me. The darling sweetheart! You know, yesterday I saw a wallet she was making me, but it's not quite finished and so she says she's sending me a lock of her hair, and the other thing will come later. Look, Arkasha, look!"

And Vasya, incoherent with happiness, showed Arkady Ivanovich a lock of the richest, blackest hair in the world; then he kissed it passionately and put it away into his breast pocket, closest to his heart.

"Vasya! I'll have a locket ordered for it!" Arkady Ivanovich said with resolution.

"And we're going to have roast veal, and then tomorrow we'll have brains; Mamma is going to make some biscuits ... and there won't be any porridge," said the boy, pausing to think how best to conclude his narrative.

"My, what a pretty little boy!" Arkady Ivanovich cried. "Vasya, you're the luckiest of mortals!"

The boy finished his tea, took Vasya's note, received a thousand kisses, and departed feeling as happy and jolly as ever.

"Well, old chap," said Arkady Ivanovich with relief, "see what luck, see? Everything's for the best, don't grieve, don't lose heart, go straight ahead! Finish it, Vasya, finish it! I'll be back at two, I'll call on them first and then on Yulian Mastakovich."

"Well good-bye, old chap, good-bye. Oh if only!... Very well then, go on," said Vasya, "and I have definitely decided against going to Yulian Mastakovich's."

"Good-bye!"

"Wait, wait a minute. Tell them ... well, tell them whatever you see fit. Kiss her ... and tell me all about it afterwards, my dear chap, all about it."

"Now then, now then—everyone knows how you feel! It's happiness that's upsetting you so! The unexpectedness of it ... you've not been yourself since yesterday. You

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

haven't yet recovered from yesterday's emotion. Well, enough! Pull yourself together, Vasya dear! Good-bye! Good-bye!"

The friends parted at last. All that morning Arkady Ivanovich was preoccupied and thought of nothing but Vasya. He knew his weak, impressionable character. "Yes, it's his happiness that has upset him so, I wasn't mistaken," he told himself. "Good Lord! He's even driven me to despondency! The tragedy he makes of trifles! Goodness, what a hothead! Ah, he must be rescued! He must be rescued!" muttered Arkady Ivanovich, apparently unaware that in his own heart he had already magnified their small family troubles—insignificant in effect—to a calamity. It was already eleven by the time he reached Yulian Mastakovich's house to add his modest name to the long list of deferential persons who had, in the entrance hall, signed their names on a sheet of paper smeared with ink and scribbled all over. But great was his surprise when Vasya Shumkov's own signature flashed before his eyes. It amazed him. "What's happening to him?" he thought. Arkady Ivanovich, so buoyant with hope a little while before, felt low-spirited as he went out. Indeed, calamity was approaching, but from where? What calamity?

He arrived in Kolomna in a gloomy frame of mind, his attention wandered at first, but after a talk with Lizanka he felt genuinely frightened for Vasya, and tears stood in his eyes when he reached the street. He started homewards at a run, and on the Neva came face to face with Vasya. He was running too.

"Where are you off to?" Arkady Ivanovich shouted.

Vasya stopped in his tracks like one caught red-handed in a crime.

"I just came out, old man, I wanted to take a little air."

"So you couldn't stand it, you were going to Kolomna, eh? Oh Vasya, Vasya! Now why did you have to go to Yulian Mastakovich's?"

Vasya said nothing; then he waved his hand and said:

"Arkady! I don't know what's happening to me! I. . . ."

"Come, Vasya, come! I know what it is. Compose yourself! You're still excited and upset after yesterday! Really,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

is it so hard to endure? Why, everyone loves you, everyone is doing his best for you, your work is getting on, you'll finish it, you're sure to finish it, I know; you've been fancying something, you've got some sort of horrors."

"No, it's nothing, nothing."

"Remember, Vasya, remember how it was with you; remember when you received your first rank in the service, you doubled your zeal from happiness and gratitude and for a whole week did nothing but ruin your work. It's the same thing now."

"Yes, yes, Arkady, only it's different now, it's not that at all."

"But look here, how is it different? Perhaps the work is not urgent at all, and you're killing yourself over it. . . ."

"It's all right, it's all right, come along."

"So it's home you're going and not to Kolomna?"

"Yes, old man, for how can I show myself there? I've changed my mind. I just couldn't stand it alone without you, but now that you're with me, I'll settle down to write. Let's go!"

They walked on in silence for a while. Vasya hurried.

"Why don't you ask me any questions about them?" Arkady Ivanovich said.

"Oh yes! Well, Arkasha dear, tell me!"

"Vasya, you're not like yourself at all!"

"Never mind, never mind. Tell me everything, do, Arkasha!" Vasya begged, as if he wished to evade further explanations. Arkady Ivanovich sighed. He felt utterly at a loss as he looked at Vasya.

Vasya actually brightened up as he listened. He even grew communicative. They had dinner. The old lady had given Arkady Ivanovich a pocketful of biscuits, and the two friends cheered up as they sat munching them. Vasya promised to go to sleep after dinner, so that he might sit up all night. He really did go to bed. Arkady Ivanovich had that morning received an invitation to tea with someone whom he could not possibly refuse. The friends parted. Arkady promised to be back as soon as possible, perhaps as early as eight o'clock. The three hours he stayed away from home seemed like three years to him. At last he managed to tear himself away and hurried back to Vasya. He

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

found the room in darkness: Vasya was not at home. He asked Mavra. Mavra said that he had been writing all the time and had not slept a wink, then he had started pacing the floor, and an hour earlier had dashed out, saying he'd be back in half an hour, " 'And when Arkady Ivanovich returns,' he said, 'you tell him that I've gone for a walk,' and he said that three or maybe four times," Mavra concluded.

"He's at the Artemyevs!" Arkady Ivanovich thought and shook his head.

A minute later, he jumped up, sudden hope exhilarating him. He must have simply finished, that's what it was, he thought. He couldn't bear it and rushed there. But on second thought, no! He would have waited for me. I'll take a look at what he's got there!

He lit a candle and eagerly made for Vasya's table. The work was progressing and there did not seem to be very much left. Arkady Ivanovich was about to investigate further, when Vasya suddenly walked in.

"Oh! You here?" he shouted, starting with fright.

Arkady Ivanovich made no response. He dreaded asking Vasya. The latter looked down without saying anything and began to sort out his papers. At last their glances met. Vasya's eyes had such a pleading, imploring, and crushed look in them, that Arkady was startled. His heart trembled and overflowed with emotion.

"Vasya, my dear brother, what's the matter with you? What is it?" he cried, rushing towards him and clasping him in his arms. "Tell me everything! I don't understand you or the cause of your distress; what is it, you poor martyr? Tell me the whole truth. Surely, it can't be this alone!"

Vasya clung to him and could not utter a word. His breath caught in his throat.

"Come, Vasya, come! Well, if you can't finish, what of it? I don't understand you. Tell me what's tormenting you? You see, for your sake I'll. . . . Oh my God, my God!" he strode about the room as he talked, clutching at anything that came his way as though seeking an instant remedy for Vasya. "I'll go myself to see Yulian Mastakovich tomorrow, I'll ask him, I'll plead with him to give you another day's grace. I'll explain everything to him, every-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

thing, if this is all that's causing you so much pain."

"God forbid!" cried Vasya, turning chalk-white. He all but fainted.

"Vasya! Vasya!"

Vasya came to himself. His lips were trembling, he tried to say something but only pressed Arkady's hand silently and convulsively. His hand was cold. Arkady stood before him, filled with anxious and painful expectation. Vasya raised his eyes to him again.

"Vasya, good heavens, Vasya! You're breaking my heart, my friend, my dear friend."

Tears gushed from Vasya's eyes; he threw himself on Arkady's breast.

"I've deceived you, Arkady!" he said. "I've deceived you; forgive me, forgive me! I've betrayed your friendship!"

"Why Vasya, what is it? What could it be?" Arkady asked, quite terrified.

"There!..."

And with a gesture of despair, Vasya pulled out a drawer and flung on to the table six great thick notebooks, similar to the one he was copying.

"What's that?"

"This is what I've got to finish by the day after tomorrow. I haven't even done a quarter of it. Don't ask me ... don't ask me how it happened!" Vasya went on, turning at once to the subject that was tormenting him so. "Arkady, my friend! I myself don't know what I was about! I seem to be coming out of a dream! I've wasted a whole three weeks, I kept on ... I ... kept going to see her. My heart was aching, I was in torment ... from uncertainty ... and I could not write. I never even gave it a thought. And only now that happiness is dawning for me, have I awakened."

"Vasya," Arkady Ivanovich said firmly. "Vasya, I shall save you. I understand it all. It is not a jesting matter. I shall save you! Listen, listen to me. I'll go and see Yulian Mastakovich tomorrow. Don't shake your head, listen! I'll tell him the whole story; allow me to do it my way ... I'll make it clear to him ... I'll go to any lengths! I'll tell him how stricken you are, how tormented."

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"Do you know that you're killing me even now?" Vasya brought out, his blood freezing from fright.

Arkady Ivanovich turned pale, but he pulled himself together and abruptly burst out laughing.

"Is that all? Just that?" he said. "Why, Vasya, Vasya, aren't you ashamed of yourself? Now listen to me. I know I'm hurting you. But you see, I understand you. I know what you're going through. Good heavens, we've been lodging together for five years now, you know! You are kind and gentle, but you're weak, inexcusably weak! You know, even Lizaveta Mikhailovna has noticed it already. And besides, you're a dreamer, and that's not good either, you know. You might go off your head, old chap. Listen, I know what you'd like. For instance, you'd like Yulian Mastakovich to be beside himself with joy and perhaps even give a ball in his delight that you are about to marry. Wait now, wait! You're frowning. You see you're up in arms for Yulian Mastakovich at my very first word! I'll leave him alone. I, too, respect him as much as you do, you know. But you can't convince me to the contrary or forbid me to think that you'd like there to be no unhappy souls in the world when you are about to marry. You must confess, old chap, that you'd like me, your best friend, to suddenly come into a hundred thousand rubles, you'd like all the enemies in the world, whoever they may be, to suddenly make up their differences for no reason at all, embrace one another in the middle of the street from happiness, and maybe even come to your flat to visit you! Oh my friend! My dear! I'm not making fun of you, it's all true; you revealed something like this to me in different ways a long time ago. Because you yourself are happy, you'd like everyone, absolutely everyone, to become happy all at once. You're finding it painful and difficult to be happy alone! That is why you're striving with all your might to be worthy of your happiness, and perhaps ease your conscience by performing some valorous deed. And so I do understand your readiness to torment yourself because in a case where you should have shown your zeal and your cleverness ... well, perhaps your gratitude, as you put it, you have suddenly been remiss. You're feeling bitterly sorry at the thought that Yulian Mastakovich will

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

frown and even grow angry when he sees that you have failed to justify the hopes he placed in you. It pains you to think that you will hear reproaches from the one you consider your benefactor—and at a moment like this, too! When your heart is brimming over with joy, and you don't know on whom to lavish your gratitude. It's so, isn't it? Isn't it?"

Arkady Ivanovich, whose voice shook at these last words, fell silent and took a deep breath.

Vasya gazed fondly at his friend. A smile flitted across his lips. And, indeed, the promise of hope seemed to light up his features.

"Well then, listen to me," Arkady took up again, more hopefully inspired still. "We don't want to let you lose favour with Yulian Mastakovich, do we, my dear boy? Is that the problem? If it is, then I," said Arkady, springing to his feet, "I shall sacrifice myself for you. I shall go to Yulian Mastakovich tomorrow. Don't argue with me! Vasya, you're making a crime out of your lapse. But Yulian Mastakovich is magnanimous and merciful, and then he's not like you! Vasya, he'll hear us out and he'll pull us out of our troubles. Are you reassured now?"

Vasya, with tears in his eyes, pressed Arkady's hand.

"Don't worry, Arkady, don't," he said, "the matter is settled. I haven't finished, so what matter? I haven't, and that's all there is to it. And there's no need for you to go. I'll tell him everything myself, I'll go to see him myself. I've calmed down, I'm quite composed, but please don't go . . . and listen. . . ."

"Vasya, oh my dear friend!" Arkady Ivanovich shouted joyfully. "I was only repeating your own words. I'm glad you've pulled yourself together and thought better of it. But no matter what happens to you, no matter what, remember that I'm with you! I see you're in anguish lest I say something to Yulian Mastakovich—I won't, I won't tell him anything, you'll tell him yourself. Now then you'll go tomorrow . . . or no, you won't, you'll stay at home and write, you see? And I'll go and find out what sort of commission this is, whether it's urgent or not, whether it's got to be finished on time, and what the consequences will be if you are late in delivering it. And then I'll hurry to you

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

See? See? There is a glimmer of hope; now imagine the commission is not urgent—we can win through, you know. Yulian Mastakovich may not say anything, and then the situation will be saved."

Vasya shook his head doubtfully. But his grateful gaze never left his friend's face.

"Enough, enough! I feel so weak, I'm so tired," he spoke breathlessly. "I don't want to think about it either. Come, let us talk of something else. You see, I don't think I'll do any more now, I'll just finish a page or two to break off at a good place. I say ... I've long been wanting to ask you: how is it you know me so well?"

Tears dropped from Vasya's eyes onto Arkady's hand.

"Vasya, if you knew how much I love you, you wouldn't ask me that, no!"

"No, no, Arkady! I don't know because ... because I don't know why you have grown to love me so! Oh Arkady, do you know that your very love was killing me? D'you know the times that I shed tears, especially when I went to bed and thought of you (for I always think of you when I go to sleep), and my heart was wrung because, because ... well, because you loved me so, and there was no way I could express my feelings, no way to thank you."

"See what you're like, Vasya, see? Look how upset you are now," said Arkady, remembering the episode in the street the day before. His heart bled.

"Come, Arkady, you want me to compose myself, whereas I've never been so happy and calm in my life! D'you know ... Listen, I'd like to tell you everything, but I'm always afraid of distressing you.... You're for ever distressing yourself and shouting at me, and it frightens me ... look at the way I'm trembling now! I don't know why. Now this is what I'd like to tell you. It seems to me I didn't know myself before, no! And I only came to know everyone else yesterday. My sense of feeling and appreciation was deficient, Arkady. My heart ... was hard within me. Look, it occurred to me that I have never done a kindness to anyone in the world, to no one at all, because I was incapable of doing it—my very appearance is unpleasant. And yet everyone has been kind to me!

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

First of all—you! As if I didn't see it. But I only kept silent, that's all!"

"Vasya, don't!"

"Why not, Arkasha? Why not? I'm just..." Vasya spoke with difficulty through his tears. "I told you about Yulian Mastakovich yesterday. You know as well as I do how strict and stern he is, he's even found fault with you more than once, and yet with me he was cheerful and affectionate yesterday, and he revealed to me the kindness of his heart which he so sensibly conceals from everyone."

"There you are, Vasya! It only goes to show that you deserve your happiness."

"Oh Arkasha! How much I wanted to finish all this work! No, I know I'll wreck my own happiness! I have a premonition. Oh no, not because of this," Vasya said, intercepting the oblique look Arkady gave the stacks of urgent work lying on the table, "that's nothing, it's just a lot of paper ... rubbish! That's a settled matter. I ... Arkasha, I was there today, at their place. I didn't go in, you know. I felt depressed and bitter! I only stood outside their door for a while. She was playing the piano, I listened. You see, Arkady," he said, pitching his voice low, "I did not have the courage to go in."

"I say, Vasya, what's wrong with you? Why do you look at me like that?"

"What? Oh, nothing! I feel rather faint, my legs are shaking; it's because I sat up all night. Now everything is going green before my eyes. It's here, here...."

He pressed his hand to his heart. He fainted.

When Vasya regained consciousness, Arkady was ready to take forcible measures. He tried to make him go to bed, but Vasya refused absolutely. He cried, he wrung his hands, he wanted to write, he was resolved to finish his two pages. Not to provoke him further, Arkady allowed him to do so.

"You see," Vasya said, settling down in his chair, "you see I have an idea too. There is hope."

He smiled at Arkady and his pale face actually seemed to light up with a ray of hope.

"Listen: I won't take it all to him the day after tomor-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

row. I'll lie about the rest, I'll tell him it got burned, or wet, or lost ... or that I haven't finished it, I cannot tell a lie. I'll explain it all to him myself, you know what? I'll explain everything to him, I'll say it was this way, I couldn't ... I'll tell him about my love; after all he's only been married a short while himself, he'll understand. Needless to say I'll go about it in a deferential and quiet way; he'll see my tears, they'll move him."

"Yes, of course, go to him, go and explain ... and there's no need to cry at all! What for? Really, Vasya, you've quite frightened me too."

"Yes, I'll go, I'll go. And now, let me write, let me write, Arkasha. I'll do no harm, just let me write!"

Arkady threw himself on the bed. He did not trust Vasya, he did not trust him at all. Vasya was liable to do anything. But to go and seek forgiveness—for what? How? That was not the point. The point was that Vasya had failed to perform his duty, that Vasya felt guilty towards himself, he felt he was being ungrateful to his lucky stars, he was crushed and stunned by his happiness and considered himself unworthy of it, that he had merely found a pretext for harping on his unworthiness, and that he had not yet recovered from his surprise of yesterday. "That's what it is!" Arkady Ivanovich thought. "He must be saved. He must be reconciled with himself. He's singing his own requiem." He thought and thought and made up his mind to go to Yulian Mastakovich at once, as soon as it was morning, and tell him everything.

Vasya was sitting and writing. Arkady Ivanovich, worn out, lay down in order to think the matter over again, and when he awoke it was almost daylight.

"Oh hell! Again!" he cried as he looked at Vasya, who was busy writing.

Arkady rushed to him, grasped him in his arms and forcibly put him to bed. Vasya smiled, his eyes closed from weakness. He could hardly talk.

"I meant to go to bed," he said. "D'you know, Arkady, I have an idea: I'll finish. I've made myself hurry. I could not have sat up longer. Wake me up at eight."

His words trailed off and he fell into a dead sleep.

"Mavra!" Arkady Ivanovich whispered to Mavra who

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

came in with their tea. "He asked to be called in an hour. Most definitely no! Let him sleep ten hours if he wants to, understand?"

"I understand, sir, I do."

"Don't make dinner, don't bother with the firewood, don't make a sound or there'll be trouble! If he asks about me, tell him I've gone to the office, understand?"

"I understand, sir, I do; let him sleep his fill, what's it to me? I like my masters to sleep well, and I take good care of my masters' things, too. That cup I broke the other day, the one you scolded me for, it wasn't me, it was the cat that did it; I don't know how she did it; off with you, you blasted cat, I said."

"Sh! Shut up, shut up!"

Arkady Ivanovich showed Mavra out into the kitchen, demanded the key of the door and locked her in. After that he went to his office. On the way there he thought of the best way to approach Yulian Mastakovich, wondering whether it would be fitting and not too audacious of him. He felt timid when he reached the office, and timidly inquired if His Excellency was in; he was told that he was not, and would not come in that day. Arkady Ivanovich wanted to go to his residence at once, but it occurred to him most opportunely that if Yulian Mastakovich had not come to the office, he must be engaged in some pressing business at home. Arkady Ivanovich remained at the office. The hours dragged on interminably. He surreptitiously tried to gather information about the work entrusted to Shumkov. But no one knew anything about it. All they knew was that Yulian Mastakovich charged him with special commissions, but what exactly they were, no one could tell. At last the clock struck three and Arkady Ivanovich rushed home. One of the clerks stopped him in the hall and told him that Vasily Petrovich Shumkov had come in some time after twelve and asked whether Arkady Ivanovich was there and whether Yulian Mastakovich had come. On hearing this, Arkady Ivanovich hired a carriage and drove to his flat, beside himself with alarm.

Shumkov was in. He was pacing the floor in extreme agitation. On seeing Arkady Ivanovich he tried to pull himself together and compose himself, and hastened to

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

conceal his agitation. He sat down to his work in silence. It seemed he wanted to evade his friend's questions, he was vexed by them and was determined to keep to himself some decision he had come to, for even friendship could no longer be relied on. This astonished Arkady and his heart was rent with a distressing, piercing pain. He sat down on his bed and opened a book at random, never taking his eyes off his poor friend. But Vasya remained stubbornly silent, he went on writing and did not look up. This continued for several hours, and Arkady's anguish rose to a pitch. At last, at about ten o'clock, Vasya raised his head and fixed a dull, stony look on Arkady. Arkady did not move. Two or three minutes went by: Vasya remained numb. "Vasya!" Arkady cried. Vasya did not respond. "Vasya!" he called again, springing from his bed. "Vasya, what's the matter with you? What is it?" he cried, running to him. Vasya raised his head and once again fixed the same dull, stony stare on him. "He's got the palsy!" Arkady thought, shaking with fear. He grabbed the water jug, propped Vasya up higher in the chair, poured some water on his head, moistened his temples, and rubbed his hands between his own. Vasya came back to his senses. "Vasya! Vasya!" Arkady cried out, no longer checking his tears. "Vasya, don't wreck your life, remember! Remember!" He could not go on and only held him close in his arms. Some painful emotion passed across Vasya's face; he rubbed his forehead and clutched at his head as if afraid it might burst.

"I don't know what's wrong with me!" he said at last. "I think I've overstrained myself. Oh well! Come, Arkady, don't take on so, don't!" he repeated, looking at Arkady with sad, tired eyes. "What's there to worry about? Come!"

"Vasya, *you* comforting me!" Arkady cried, his heart breaking. "Vasya," he said at last, "lie down, try to sleep a little, eh? Don't torment yourself needlessly. You'll get down to your work again afterwards."

"Yes, yes," Vasya kept saying, "have it your own way. I'll lie down; all right; yes, you see I was going to finish it but I've changed my mind now, yes. . . ."

Arkady drew him towards the bed.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

"Listen, Vasya," he said firmly, "we've got to settle this matter once and for all! Tell me, what's preying on your mind?"

"Oh!" Vasya waved a limp hand and turned his face away.

"Come, Vasya, come! You must tell me! I don't want to be your murderer: I can't remain silent any longer. You won't be able to fall asleep unless you've told me first, I know."

"As you like, as you like," Vasya said enigmatically.

"He's giving in," thought Arkady Ivanovich.

"Take my advice, Vasya," he said, "remember what I said to you, I'll save you tomorrow, I'll settle your fate for you tomorrow! Oh, but what am I saying: fate! You have frightened me so, Vasya, that I'm beginning to speak the way you do. Fate, indeed! It's sheer rubbish, nonsense! You don't want to lose Yulian Mastakovich's favour or—if you like to put it that way—his affection, that's what it is! And you won't lose it, you'll see I . . . I. . . ."

Arkady Ivanovich would have talked much longer, but Vasya cut him short. He raised himself in bed, hugged Arkady and kissed him.

"Don't," he said faintly, "don't! Don't say any more!" And he turned his face to the wall again.

"Oh God!" Arkady thought. "Oh God! What is it? He's utterly lost; what has he decided to do? He'll kill himself!"

Arkady looked at him in despair.

"If he fell ill," Arkady was thinking, "it would be for the better perhaps. His anxiety would pass with his illness and by then the matter would have been settled most satisfactorily. Oh, but I'm raving! Oh, good God in heaven!"

Meanwhile, Vasya seemed to have fallen into a doze. Arkady Ivanovich was relieved. "A good sign," he thought. He decided to sit up with Vasya all night. Vasya was restless, he tossed and turned, jerked up nervously, and opened his eyes for a moment. At last his fatigue got the better of him; he seemed to be fast asleep. It was about two in the morning; Arkady Ivanovich dozed off in his chair, with his elbow resting on the table.

His sleep was fitful and strange. He fancied that he

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

was not asleep at all and that Vasya was lying on the bed as before. But how odd! It seemed to him that Vasya was pretending, that he was actually deceiving him, that there he was cautiously getting up, watching him with narrowed eyes, and was stealing towards the table. A searing pain pierced Arkady's heart; it wounded, saddened, and distressed him to see that Vasya no longer trusted him, that he was holding something back from him. He tried to call to him, to clasp him in his arms and carry him back to bed. But Vasya cried out, and it was his dead body he was bearing back to bed. Cold beads of sweat stood out on Arkady's brow, his heart beat wildly. He opened his eyes and was wide awake. Vasya was sitting at the table, writing.

Not believing his senses, Arkady glanced at the bed: Vasya was not there. Arkady sprang to his feet in alarm, still under the influence of his dream. Vasya never stirred. He kept on writing. To his horror, Arkady suddenly noticed that there was no ink on the pen Vasya was running over the paper, that the pages he was turning over were perfectly clean, and he was hurrying, hurrying to cover the pages, as if he were performing his task with great efficiency and success. "No, it isn't the palsy," Arkady Ivanovich thought, and his whole frame shook. "Vasya, Vasya, speak to me!" he shouted, gripping Vasya's shoulder. But Vasya remained silent and continued writing with his dry pen.

"At last I am writing faster," he muttered, without looking up at Arkady.

Arkady caught Vasya's hand and pulled away the pen.

Vasya groaned. He dropped his hand and raised his eyes to Arkady, then he brushed his hand across his forehead with a gesture of weary vexation, as if he wanted to push away some heavy, leaden weight that was bearing down upon his entire being, and then he dropped his head on his breast, slowly and pensively.

"Vasya! Vasya!" Arkady Ivanovich cried in despair. "Vasya!"

A minute passed before Vasya looked up at him. His large blue eyes were filled with tears, and his wan, gentle face expressed infinite anguish. He whispered something.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

"What? What did you say?" Arkady cried, bending over him.

"What have I done? What have I done to deserve it?" Vasya was whispering. "What for? What have I done to deserve it?"

"Vasya! Speak to me! What's frightening you, Vasya, what is it?" Arkady cried, wringing his hands in despair.

"Why are they sending me into the army?" said Vasya, looking straight into his friend's eyes. "What for? What have I done?"

Arkady's hair stood on end: he refused to believe it. He was utterly crushed. But in a minute he recovered. "It's nothing, it will pass," he said to himself, his face pale and his bloodless lips trembling. He hastily put on his clothes. He wanted to run and fetch a doctor. Suddenly Vasya called to him; Arkady darted to him and held him close, like a mother whose child is being torn away from her.

"Arkady, Arkady, don't tell anyone! You hear me, it's my own misfortune! Let me be the only one to suffer."

"Why Vasya, collect yourself, think what you're saying!"

Vasya sighed, and tears slowly coursed down his cheeks.

"But why should they kill her? For what? How is she to blame?" he muttered in a tortured, heart-rending voice. "It's my crime, my crime!. . ."

He was silent a moment.

"Good-bye, my beloved! Good-bye, my beloved!" he whispered, shaking his poor head. Arkady shuddered, started, and turned to rush out for the doctor. "Let's go! It's time!" Vasya cried, aroused by Arkady's sudden movement. "Let us go, old chap, let's go; I am ready! You take me there!" he broke off and glanced at Arkady with a stricken and mistrustful look.

"Vasya, don't follow me, for heaven's sake! Wait for me here. I'll only be a minute. I'll come back to you at once," Arkady Ivanovich cried, losing his head too. He snatched up his cap and hurried for the doctor. Vasya sat down docilely; he was meek and quiet, and only his eyes shone with a desperate sort of resolve. Remembering an open clasp knife lying on the table, Arkady came back,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

pocketed it, looked at his poor friend for the last time, and rushed out of the flat.

It was after seven. The morning sun had long since driven the darkness from the room.

He couldn't find a doctor. He ran about for a whole hour. All the doctors whose addresses he learned from the janitors whom he approached to ask if there wasn't a doctor living in the house had already left on their morning calls or had gone about their own affairs. He only found one doctor who was receiving patients at this hour. But he first questioned the servant who announced Nefedevich in great detail: who had sent him, who and why, and what was his complaint, and he even asked what this early visitor of his looked like? And as a result he said he could not receive him, he was too busy to go out on a call, and that patients of this sort should be taken to the hospital.

Arkady, stricken and astonished, never expecting his efforts to end this way, gave up everything, all the doctors in the world, and hurried home, keyed up with anxiety for Vasya. He rushed into the flat. Mavra, completely unruffled, was sweeping the floor, chopping firewood, and getting ready to light the stove. He ran into the room—there was no trace of Vasya: he was gone.

"Where? Where would the poor fellow go?" Arkady wondered, his blood running cold from fear. He asked Mavra: she knew nothing, had seen nothing, and had not even heard him go out, bless him. Nefedevich rushed to Kolomna. Heaven knows why it occurred to him that Vasya might be there.

It was already after nine when he arrived there. They were surprised to see him, but they knew nothing at all. He stood before them, alarmed and distressed, and asked them where Vasya was. The old lady's legs gave way; she collapsed on to the sofa. Lizanka, shaking with alarm, wanted him to tell her what had happened. What was there to tell? Arkady Ivanovich put them off with a story he invented on the spur of the moment, which they did not believe, of course, and hurried away, leaving them overwhelmed and stricken. He made haste to reach his office on time and let them know, so that steps could be

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

taken as soon as possible. It struck him that perhaps Vasya was at Yulian Mastakovich's. That was most probable! It had occurred to him before he ever thought of the Artemyevs. He ordered the driver to stop as he went past His Excellency's home, but instantly told him to drive on. He decided to try and find out if anything was known at the office and then, if Vasya hadn't been there, he would present himself to His Excellency, at least as one making a report about Vasya. Somebody would have to make the report, anyway!

The minute he entered the hall he was surrounded by the younger of his colleagues, mostly his equals in rank, and plied with questions about Vasya. All of them spoke at the same time, saying that Vasya had gone out of his mind, his mania being that they were going to send him into the army because he had been remiss in his duties. Arkady Ivanovich answered right and left, or, I should say, he gave no one a definite answer, and pressed on to the inner rooms. On the way he learnt that Vasya was with Yulian Mastakovich, that everyone had gone in there and that Hesper Ivanovich was there too. This made him pause. One of his superiors asked him where he was going and what he wanted. Without distinguishing the speaker's face, he mumbled something about Vasya and walked straight towards the room. He could hear Yulian Mastakovich's voice coming from within. "Where are you going?" someone asked him at the very door. Arkady Ivanovich almost lost courage; he was about to turn back, when suddenly he saw his poor Vasya through the half-open door. He pushed it wide open and went in. Confusion and bewilderment reigned in the room, because Yulian Mastakovich, it seemed, was deeply distressed. The more important of the gentlemen stood close beside him, discussing the matter and arriving at no decision whatever. Vasya stood apart. Arkady's heart sank when he looked at him. Vasya stood rigidly at attention, his face pale and his head held high. He was staring straight into the eyes of Yulian Mastakovich. Nefedevich's arrival was noted instantly, and someone who knew that the two lodged together, informed His Excellency of the fact. Arkady was taken up to him. He looked at Yulian Masta-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

kovich, prepared to answer all the questions put to him, but when he saw the sincere pity written on his face, Arkady burst into shuddering sobs like a child. Indeed, he did more: he seized his superior's hand and raised it to his eyes, drenching it with his tears, so that Yulian Mastakovich himself was obliged to pull it hastily away, shake it and say, "Enough now, young man, enough, I see that you have a good heart." Arkady sobbed and threw beseeching glances at all those present. He believed that everyone felt brotherly love for his poor Vasya, that all of them were in torment too and were weeping for him. "But what caused it, why did this happen to him?" Yulian Mastakovich asked. "Why did he go out of his mind?"

"From gra-grati-ti-tude!" was all Arkady Ivanovich could utter.

His answer puzzled everyone, and, indeed, it seemed a strange and incredible thing: how could a man possibly go out of his mind from gratitude? Arkady explained as best he could.

"Good Lord, what a pity!" Yulian Mastakovich spoke at last. "And the work entrusted to him was neither important nor very urgent. A life wrecked for no reason at all! Oh well, take him away!" Whereupon Yulian Mastakovich turned to Arkady Ivanovich once more, and asked him to tell the whole story again. "He asks," he said, indicating Vasya, "that a certain girl should not be told about this; who is she, his fiancée?"

Arkady began to explain the situation. Meanwhile, Vasya seemed preoccupied with some thought, he seemed to be making a strenuous effort to recollect something important and essential, which was just what was needed at the moment. Now and then he gazed about him with a look of suffering in his eyes, as though hoping that someone would remind him of what it was he had forgotten. His eyes came to rest on Arkady Ivanovich. Suddenly, a glimmer of hope seemed to light in them, he started, and marched three paces, left foot forward, as smartly as he could, even clicking the heel of his right foot, like a soldier coming to attention to answer an officer's summons. Everyone watched and waited for what was to come next.

"I have a physical defect, Your Excellency, I am short

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

and weak, I am not fit for military service," he jerked out the words.

At this, everyone in the room felt his heart wrenched, and even Yulian Mastakovich, for all his firmness, was moved to tears. "Take him away!" he said with a wave of his hand.

"Marching orders!" Vasya said in an undertone and, turning sharply on his heel, marched out of the room. All the gentlemen who felt concern for his predicament rushed after him. Arkady pressed close behind the others. They seated Vasya in the waiting-room, in anticipation of the ambulance to come and take him away to the hospital. He sat in silence and appeared to be greatly preoccupied. He nodded to those he recognised as though he were bidding them good-bye. He kept glancing at the door, prepared to hear the word "go". A crowd of people surrounded him in a close circle: all shook their heads and all lamented his fate. Many were amazed by Vasya's story, which was common property by then. Some discussed it, others pitied and praised Vasya, who was such a modest and quiet young man, they said, and was so promising; they went on to say how hard he had tried to study, what an inquisitive mind he had, and how he had striven to improve himself. "He rose above his low station in life by his own effort," someone observed. Yulian Mastakovich's attachment to Vasya was spoken of with feeling. Explanations were offered by some why the fear of being sent into the army had entered Vasya's mind and deranged it. They said that the poor chap had until just recently belonged to the class liable for military service, and had only been promoted to his first rank through the mediation of Yulian Mastakovich, who was appreciative of his giftedness, obedience, and rare meekness. In short, opinions and comments were varied and many. One of Vasya's colleagues, a very short man, stood out particularly among the overwhelmed. And it wasn't that he was so very young either, he must have been about thirty. But he was as white as a sheet, his whole body trembled, and he smiled a strange sort of smile—for the reason, perhaps, that a shocking affair or scene of horror is apt to appear frightening and at the same time rather fascinating to a mere on-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

looker. He kept running around the circle of gentlemen surrounding Vasya, and being a short little man, he would stand on tiptoe, clutch at the coat buttons of all and sundry—that is, all those he had a right to clutch—and repeat over and over again that he knew the reason for all this, that it was not a trifling sort of matter at all but rather a grave one, and that something had to be done; then he'd rise up on tiptoe again, whisper into his listener's ear, nod his head once or twice, and run on again. Everything was over at last: a doctor and an orderly arrived from the hospital, they went up to Vasya and told him it was time to go. He jumped up hastily and followed them out. He kept glancing back over his shoulder: he was searching for someone with his eyes. "Vasya! Vasya!" Arkady Ivanovich cried out, sobbing. Vasya stopped, and Arkady managed to force his way through to him. They rushed into each other's arms for the last time, and clung together in a tight embrace. It made one sad to look at them. What chimera of grief was wrenching the tears from their eyes! Why were they crying? What was this disaster? Why had they not understood each other?...

"Here, here, take this! Keep it for me," Shumkov said, thrusting a folded piece of paper into Arkady's hand. "They'll take it from me. Bring it to me afterwards, please; keep it for me...." Vasya did not finish, someone called him. He ran hurriedly down the stairs, nodding to everyone, saying good-bye. There was despair in his expression. At last they settled him in the ambulance, and drove off. Arkady quickly unfolded the paper: in it was Liza's lock of black hair, which Vasya never parted with. Stinging tears gushed from Arkady's eyes: "Ah, poor Liza!"

His office hours over, he set out for Kolomna. What happened there is beyond description. Even Petya, little Petya, without quite understanding what had become of good, kind Vasya, went into a corner, covered his face with his hands, and sobbed from the depths of his young heart. It was already dusk when Arkady started back for home. As he approached the Neva he paused for a minute and gazed intently down the river, into the foggy distance, hazy with frost and suddenly flushed with the last

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

crimson glow of the blood-red sun which was slowly sinking beyond the misty horizon. Night was descending upon the town, and in the parting reflection of the sun the whole expanse of the Neva—boundless, and swollen with the frozen snow—scintillated with a myriad sparks scattered by the silvery needles of hoar-frost. The temperature must have dropped to twenty below. Frozen steam rose from the hard-ridden horses and from the hurrying pedestrians. The thin air quivered with the slightest sound, and columns of smoke uncoiled like giants from all the roof-tops on both sides of the river and streamed upwards in the cold sky, twining and untwining as they rose, and it seemed that new buildings were appearing above the old, a new city was taking shape in the air. In this hour of twilight it seemed that all this world with all its inhabitants, the strong and the weak, with all their dwellings, be they the asylums of the paupers or the gilded palaces—the solace of the mighty of this world—was like a phantasm, magic and illusory, a dream which would vanish momentarily and fade away in vapour towards the dark blue sky. Strange thoughts haunted poor Vasya's bereaved friend. He started, and a hot rush of blood, rising suddenly from some powerful and never experienced emotion, flooded his heart. It seemed that only now he was able to understand all this disaster and what had driven his poor Vasya, who could not bear his happiness, out of his mind. His lips quivered, his eyes flashed, he paled, and in that moment he seemed to pierce the veil into a new beyond....

He grew melancholy and gloomy and lost all his cheerfulness. He came to loathe his old flat and moved into another one. He could not go to Kolomna, nor did he wish to. Two years later he met Lizanka in church. She was already married, and behind her walked a wet-nurse, carrying a baby. They talked, and for as long as possible they tried to put off mentioning the past. Liza told him she was happy, she was not poor, her husband was a good man and she loved him. But suddenly, in the middle of her speech, her eyes filled with tears, her voice grew faint and, turning away, she sank on her knees on the parvis, to hide her sorrow from the world....

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

A MOST UNFORTUNATE INCIDENT

A Short Story

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

This unfortunate incident occurred just when there began, with such irrepressible *élan*, such a naïve and touching impulse, the renaissance of our dear mother country, and the minds of all her valiant sons were fired with new hopes and a desire for new destinies. One clear frosty winter night, the hour being past 11 o'clock, three highly respectable gentlemen sat in a comfortably, even luxuriously furnished room in a certain excellent two-storey mansion on the Petersburg Side, engaged in weighty and lofty converse on a most interesting topic. All three gentlemen had the rank of General. They were seated around a small table, each in a fine cushioned armchair, quietly and comfortably sipping champagne as they conversed. The bottle was on the table, in a silver bucket half full of ice. The host, Privy Councillor Stepan Nikiforovich Nikiforov, a confirmed bachelor of sixty-five, was celebrating both his installation in the house he had just purchased, and his birthday, which happened to coincide and which he had never before celebrated. It was not much of a celebration, of course. As we have already seen there were only two guests, both of them former colleagues and subordinates of Mr. Nikiforov and both of them Councillors of State—their names were Semyon Ivanovich Shipulenko and Ivan Ilyich Pralinsky. They had arrived at about nine for tea, and then had started on the champagne, knowing that at half past eleven sharp they would have to go home, for their host liked to keep regular hours. A few words about him—he had started on his career as a humble, hard-up official, had calmly drudged for forty-five years, perfectly aware of the rank which he would attain, had not the slightest intention of aiming for the

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

stars in heaven, though he had already been decorated with two, and in particular was not fond of coming out, on any subject whatever, with his private opinion. He was honest, that is to say, he had never found it necessary to do anything particularly dishonest; he was a bachelor, from sheer selfishness; he was no fool, though he did not make a display of his intelligence; most of all he hated disorderliness and enthusiasm, which latter he considered moral disorderliness, and towards the end of his life had become completely immersed in the delicious, indolent comfort of his existence and in his solitude. He did sometimes visit people of the better sort, but from his youth had always disliked entertaining in his own home, and of late, when he did not play grand patience, contented himself with the company of his clock, imperturbably listening for evenings on end to its ticking under the glass dome on the mantelpiece. In appearance he was perfectly respectable, he was clean-shaven, did not look his age, was well preserved, and gave promise of living a long time yet; and he behaved in the most gentlemanly manner. His post was a fairly comfortable one, requiring him to attend sessions and sign some kind of papers. In a word he was considered an excellent man. He had only one passion, or, rather, one ardent desire—to possess a house of his own, and a real gentleman's house, not just a solid dwelling. This desire was at last fulfilled, he had chosen and purchased a house on the Petersburg Side, rather far out, it is true, but a house with a garden, and, what is more, this house was extremely elegant. The new owner reasoned that the further out he lived, the better, since he was not fond of receiving guests in his home, and for visits and going to his office he had a fine chocolate-coloured carriage to seat two, a coachman named Mikhei, and a pair of small but sturdy and handsome horses. All this was the fruit of forty years of niggling economy, and he could therefore rejoice in it wholeheartedly. That is why, having purchased the house and moved in, Stepan Nikiforovich felt such content in his tranquil heart that he actually invited guests on his birthday, a date he had hitherto carefully concealed from his most intimate friends. As a matter of fact he had certain views in regard

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

to one of his guests. He himself only occupied the top storey of his house, and he needed a tenant for the lower storey, which was laid out in exactly the same way. Stepan Nikiforovich quite counted on Semyon Ivanovich Shipulenko, and had twice turned the conversation to this subject during the evening. But Semyon Ivanovich would not commit himself. He, too, was a man who had carved out his career slowly and laboriously; he had black hair and whiskers, and there was something permanently jaundiced in his countenance. He was married and a morose stay-at-home, keeping his family in perpetual terror, attending to his duties with the utmost confidence, and also perfectly aware of the rank he would attain, and, still better, of what he would never attain. He had a good post and he held it fast. He regarded, not without a certain rancour, the new era just beginning to dawn, but it did not cause him any particular alarm. He was confident in himself and listened to Ivan Ilyich Pralinsky's harangues on the new topics with a sneer. By now, it should be remarked, they were all a little light-headed, and Stepan Nikiforovich himself condescended to enter into a slight argument with Mr. Pralinsky about the new era. We must now say a few words about His Excellency Mr. Pralinsky, especially since it is he who is the hero in this story.

Councillor of State Ivan Ilyich Pralinsky had only been called Your Excellency these last four months, in a word, he was a newly fledged General. In years, too, he was young, not more than forty-three, and he looked, and liked to look, still younger. He was a tall handsome man who took pride in his clothes, wore his star with the utmost *savoir faire*, affected a few aristocratic tricks of manner acquired in his childhood, and, while remaining a bachelor, dreamed of a wealthy, perhaps even an aristocratic bride. He still indulged in dreams, though he was far from stupid. He was inclined to hold forth, and liked to assume parliamentary poses. He came of a good family, was a General's son, and something of a fop. In his early childhood he wore velvet and cambric, and went to an aristocratic school; and though he did not gain much knowledge there, he did well in his office, and rose to

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

the rank of General. His superiors considered him an able man, and even placed hopes in him. But Stepan Nikiforovich, under whose aegis he had begun his career and continued it almost to the rank of General, had never considered him a particularly efficient man, and placed no hopes in him whatever. It pleased him, however, that Ivan Ilyich came of a good family, possessed property—that is to say, a large stone mansion managed by a steward—was related to some not undistinguished persons, and, in addition, had a good presence. In his heart Stepan Nikiforovich censured him for his excitable imagination and his frivolity. Ivan Ilyich himself sometimes felt that he was oversensitive, perhaps even touchy. Every now and then he had unaccountable fits of sickly remorse as if there were something about which he should feel slightly conscience-stricken. With bitterness and secret pangs, he then admitted to himself that he had not really soared so high as he liked to think. At such moments he became quite despondent, especially when his piles were giving him trouble, and then he alluded to his life as *une existence manquée*, and even ceased to believe (quite privately, of course) in his parliamentary gifts, calling himself a *parleur* and a *phraseur*; but while this was of course highly creditable, it did not in the least prevent him, half an hour later, from throwing out his chest, cheering up, and assuring himself still more resolutely and arrogantly than before, that he would show his mettle yet, and that he would be not only a high official, but a statesman too, and one whom Russia would long remember. Sometimes he actually had visions of monuments. All this goes to show that Ivan Ilyich aimed high, while hiding deep in his heart, with certain misgivings, his vague dreams and aspirations. In a word, he was a good man, a poet at heart. During the last few years, moments of morbid disillusionment had begun to visit him with increasing frequence. He grew extremely irritable and suspicious, and was ready to regard the slightest opposition as an insult. But the new spirit in Russia instilled great hopes in him. His promotion to the rank of General confirmed them. He took heart; he held his head high. He began to talk a great deal and most eloquently, on the very latest topics,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

all of which he took up with remarkable rapidity and zeal. He sought opportunities of speaking, went about the town, and in many places earned the reputation of a desperate liberal, which he found immensely flattering. On this particular evening, after three or four glasses of champagne, he was in great form. He was seized by a desire to make Stepan Nikiforovich, whom he had not seen for a long time and whom he had always respected and even submitted to, change his views on all points. For some reason he considered Stepan Nikiforovich a retrograde, and attacked him with the utmost ardour. Stepan Nikiforovich, who made hardly any attempt at defending himself, only smiled craftily, though the subject interested him. Ivan Ilyich worked himself up and in the heat of what he imagined to be a discussion, turned more often than he should have to his glass. Whenever he took a drink, Stepan Nikiforovich picked up the bottle and filled up his guest's glass, and for some reason Ivan Ilyich began suddenly to take umbrage at this, especially since Semyon Ivanovich Shipulenko for whom he had a great contempt, and whom, moreover, he feared for his cynicism and malevolence, maintained a most insidious silence beside him, smiling more frequently than was strictly needed. "They think my arguments puerile, I believe," flashed through the head of Ivan Ilyich.

"No. It's time, it's high time," he continued eagerly. "We have let it go on too long, and in my view humaneness is the great thing. Humaneness to subordinates, remembering that they, too, are human beings. Humaneness will save everything and put everything right."

A snigger came from Semyon Ivanovich.

"But what are you upbrading us so severely for?" objected Stepan Nikiforovich at last, with a courteous smile. "I confess, Ivan Ilyich, that I still can't quite make out what you are trying to tell us. You recommend humaneness. That means love for one's fellow man, doesn't it?"

"Well, yes, love for one's fellow man if you like. I. . . ."

"Just a minute! As far as I can judge it is not a matter of this alone. Love of one's fellow creatures has always been commendable. But the reform will not confine itself to that. Questions regarding the peasantry, legal, econom-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

ic, moral and ... and ... any number of others have arisen, and taken all together, all at once, they may cause great ... er ... waverings. That is what makes us anxious, and not just humaneness. ..."

"Oh yes, it goes deeper than that," remarked Semyon Ivanovich.

"I understand that very well, and allow me to remark, Semyon Ivanovich, that I would not yield to you in profundity of understanding," said Ivan Ilyich caustically, his tone unnecessarily harsh. "I will, however, make so bold as to inform you, too, Stepan Nikiforovich, that you do not quite understand me."

"I do not."

"And yet I maintain and everywhere promote the idea that humaneness, especially humaneness to subordinates, from the official to the clerk, from the clerk to the yardman, from the servant to the muzhik—humaneness, I say, might become, as it were, the cornerstone of future reforms and the renewing of things in general. Why? Because! Take this syllogism—I am humane, therefore I am loved. I am loved, consequently I am trusted. I am trusted, consequently I am believed in. I am believed in, consequently I am loved—that is to say, I mean, if people believe, then they will believe in the reform, they will understand, so to speak, the essence of the thing, they will embrace one another morally, so to speak, and decide everything fraternally, thoroughly. What are you laughing at, Semyon Ivanovich? Haven't I made myself clear?"

Stepan Nikiforovich silently raised his eyebrows. He was astonished.

"I'm afraid I must have had a drop too much," remarked Semyon Ivanovich caustically, "and am therefore a bit slow in the uptake. A temporary aberration, no doubt."

Ivan Ilyich winced.

"We shan't be able to keep it up," said Stepan Nikiforovich suddenly, after slight reflection.

"What d'you mean we shan't be able to keep it up?" asked Ivan Ilyich astonished at Stepan Nikiforovich's unexpected and abrupt remark.

"We just won't be able to keep it up." Stepan Nikifo-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

rovich apparently had no desire to go into explanations.

"You're not thinking about new wine and old bottles, are you?" retorted Ivan Ilyich with a shade of irony. "Oh, no, sir, I will answer for myself."

Just then the clock struck half past eleven.

"I suppose it is time we went," said Semyon Ivanovich, making as if to rise from his chair. But Ivan Ilyich forestalled him, springing up quickly and taking his sable cap from the mantelpiece. He looked a little offended.

"Well, Semyon Ivanovich, will you think it over?" said Stepan Nikiforovich, seeing his visitors out.

"About the apartment, you mean? I will, I'll think it over."

"And when you have made up your mind, let me know as soon as possible."

"A business matter, I take it?" remarked Mr. Pralinsky, with a kind of obsequious courtesy, and playing with his cap. He felt left out, ignored.

Stepan Nikiforovich raised his brows, but said nothing, as if to show that he had no wish to delay his guests. Semyon Ivanovich hastily took his leave.

"Oh, very well, then ... since you don't understand common civility," Mr. Pralinsky thought to himself, and held his hand out to Stepan Nikiforovich almost defiantly.

Once in the hall Ivan Ilyich wrapped his expensive and light fur-lined coat round him, trying to look as if he did not notice Semyon Ivanovich's worn racoon and they both started down the stairs.

"The old fellow seems to have taken offence," said Ivan Ilyich to the silent Semyon Ivanovich.

"Oh, no—what makes you think that?" replied the latter coldly and placidly.

"Flunkey!" thought Ivan Ilyich.

They went out on to the porch. Semyon Ivanovich's sleigh, drawn by an uncomely grey stallion, was brought round.

"What the devil! What on earth has Trifon done with my carriage?" cried Ivan Ilyich not seeing his carriage anywhere.

He looked here and there, but there was no carriage. Stepan Nikiforovich's footman knew nothing about it.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

They asked Varlam, Semyon Ivanovich's coachman, who told them that Ivan Ilyich's coachman and carriage had been there all the time, and now they weren't there any more.

"Most unfortunate!" said Mr. Shipulenko. "Can I give you a lift?"

"Those scoundrelly servants!" cried Mr. Pralinsky in a rage. "Asked leave to go to a wedding, the hound, here on the Petersburg Side, some crony of his getting married, confound her. I strictly forbade him to go away. And now I'm ready to wager that's where he's gone."

"He has," said Varlam, "that's where he went. He promised to be back in a minute, he said he'd be here by the time you came out."

"There you are! I was sure of it! I'll give it to him!"

"Better send him to the police station for a good flogging. Then he'll do what he's told," said Semyon Ivanovich, drawing up the carriage rug.

"Please don't trouble, Semyon Ivanovich!"

"Just as you like, I can easily take you along."

"Good-bye, *merci*!"

Semyon Ivanovich drove off and Ivan Ilyich walked away over the wooden pavement, feeling badly ruffled.

"I'll give it to you, you rascal! I'll go on foot to spite you, to make you feel it, to frighten you! He'll come back and discover his master has gone on foot, the scoundrel!"

Ivan Ilyich had never before given way to his temper like this, but he really was furious, besides his head was going round. He was not a drinking man, and a mere five or six glasses affected him immediately. But it was a beautiful night, frosty and unusually quiet and windless. The sky was clear and starry. The light of the full moon flooded the earth with a muted silvery sheen. It was so pleasant to be out that Ivan Ilyich after the first fifty paces almost forgot his mishap. A sensation of extraordinary well-being stole over him. When people are a little drunk their mood keeps changing. He even found some charm in the shabby little wooden houses lining the deserted street.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"After all, it's a good thing I went on foot," he told himself, "it'll be a lesson for Trifon, and for me it's a pleasure. I ought to walk more. I'm sure to find a droshky on Bolshoi Prospekt. What a lovely night! And just look at all these little houses! Probably that's where the small fry live, clerks ... perhaps tradesmen. Oh, that Stepan Nikiforovich! And what retrogrades they all are, the old fogies! Fogies—*c'est le mot.* Still, he's a clever chap. He has that *bon sens*, that sober practical comprehension of things. But, oh, those old men, those old men! They lack that what's-its-name—never mind, they lack it. 'We shan't be able to keep it up'—what did he mean by that? He even paused to think before saying it. He didn't quite understand me, by the way. How could anybody help understanding? Harder not to understand than to understand. The great thing is that I am convinced, profoundly convinced. Humaneness ... love of one's fellow man. Restore human beings to themselves ... revive their self-respect and then ... start afresh with ready-made material. Clear enough, I think. Yes, sir! Be so kind, Your Excellency, as to accept the syllogism—we meet a clerk, for example, some poor, oppressed clerk. Well ... who are you? The answer: so and so, such and such a clerk. Do you work? I do. Do you wish to be happy? I do. What do you require to make you happy? This and that. Why? Because ... and the man understands me before I have said half a dozen words. The man is mine, the man is caught, so to speak, in the net, and I can do what I like with him, for his own good, I mean. That Semyon Ivanovich is a bad lot. Very unpleasant phiz.... 'Have him flogged!' He said it to annoy me. Oh, no, you don't—flog him yourself. I shan't! I will shame Trifon with words, with reproaches. I will shame him, and he'll feel it, you'll see. As for the rod, hm, an as yet unsolved problem, hm.... What about going to Mademoiselle Emerans? The devil—this accursed wooden pavement!" he cried, suddenly losing his footing. "And this is the capital! Enlightenment! I might have broken my leg. Hm. I detest that Semyon Ivanovich—a nasty phiz he has. It was he who giggled when I said 'morally embrace'. Well, and if they do, what's it to you? I shan't embrace *you*—sooner a muzhik.... If I meet a

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

muzhik I shall stop and speak to him. Of course I was drunk and perhaps I didn't express myself properly. Perhaps I'm not expressing myself properly now, either. Hm. I'll never drink again. You talk too much, and the next day you wish you hadn't. And I can walk straight.... And, they're all scoundrels anyway, every one of them!"

Thus argued Ivan Ilyich in broken disconnected phrases, as he continued to stride along. The fresh air had a sobering effect on him. Another five minutes and he would have calmed down and felt inclined for sleep. But suddenly, within a very few paces of the Bolshoi Prospekt, he caught the sound of music. He looked round. On the other side of the street in an extremely dilapidated wooden house, only one storey high but very long, there were sounds of merriment, fiddles scraping, a double-bass booming, and a flute shrilling out the tune of a gay quadrille. In front of the windows there was a small crowd, mostly women in padded cloaks with kerchiefs on their heads, straining to see something, however little, through the chinks in the shutters. Obviously it was a jolly party. The stamping of the dancers' feet could be heard from the opposite side of the road. Ivan Ilyich noticed a policeman not far away and went up to him.

"Whose house is that, my good man?" he asked, opening his expensive coat just enough for the policeman to see the important Order on his breast.

"Civil servant Pseldonimov's, he's a registrar," replied the policeman, drawing himself up. He had at once noticed the sign of distinction.

"Pseldonimov? Ha! Pseldonimov! What's going on? Is it his wedding?"

"Yes, Your Excellency, he's marrying the titular councillor's daughter. Mlekopitayev, titular councillor—used to serve on the Municipal Council. The house goes with the bride."

"Ah, so the house is Pseldonimov's now, and not Mlekopitayev's."

"Pseldonimov's, Your Excellency. It used to be Mlekopitayev's and now it's Pseldonimov's."

"Hm. I ask you this, because I am his chief. I'm a General in the office where Pseldonimov works."

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"At your service, Your Excellency!" The policeman drew himself up still straighter, but Ivan Ilyich seemed to be lost in thought. He stood there, thinking.

Yes, Pseldonimov really worked in his department, in his own office. He remembered now. He was a petty official with a salary of about ten rubles a month. Mr. Pralinsky had taken over the office quite recently, and could hardly be expected to know everything about all his subordinates, but Pseldonimov he remembered, precisely on account of his name. It had struck him the first time he came across it, so that even then he had cast a more than ordinarily curious glance at the owner of such a name. Now he remembered him, a very young man with a long aquiline nose, tufty flaxen hair, very lean and ill nourished, in an impossible uniform and trousers that were shabby to the point of indecency. He remembered how even then the thought had passed through his mind: should he not assign the poor wretch a ten-ruble note for the holiday, to get himself something to eat? But since the poor fellow's face was so very unprepossessing and its expression so very unpleasing, incapable of arousing any feeling but disgust, the kind intentions had somehow vanished into thin air, and Pseldonimov remained unrewarded. All the greater had been the astonishment of Ivan Ilyich when this same Pseldonimov, not more than a week ago, came to ask permission to get married. Ivan Ilyich remembered that he had had no time to look into the matter thoroughly, and that the question of the wedding was decided hastily and superficially. And yet he remembered quite clearly that Pseldonimov was to get a wooden house and four hundred rubles in cash with his bride; he had been struck by the circumstance at the time. He even remembered making some playful remark at the amusing conjunction of the names, both so odd—Mlekopitayev and Pseldonimov. He remembered it all vividly.

Remembering, he fell deeper and deeper into thought. It is common knowledge that long arguments sometimes pass through our minds in a flash, in the form of sensations, without being translated into ordinary, not to mention literary, language. We will, however, endeavour to translate all these sensations of our hero and offer the

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

reader at least the essence of them, all that was most important and comprehensible in them. For many of our sensations, when translated into ordinary language, sound quite incredible. That is why they never emerge into the daylight, though everyone experiences them. The sensations and thoughts of Ivan Ilyich were somewhat disconnected. But then we know the reason for this.

"Well, now!" it flashed through his mind. "We do nothing but talk and talk, and when it comes to deeds, we simply thumb our noses. Take this same Pseldonimov, for example. He has just returned from the steps of the altar, agitated, hopeful, impatient to taste of conjugal bliss.... It is one of the happiest days of his life ... now he is entertaining his guests, giving a feast—humble, poor, but cheerful, joyous, cordial. Well, now, if he could know that at this very moment I—I, his chief, his principal, am standing outside his house, listening to his music! Now, really—what would he do? What would he do if I were to walk straight in? At first, of course, he'd be taken aback, he'd be almost stunned. Perhaps I'd be intruding, upsetting everything.... Yes, that's how it would be if any other General were to walk in, but not me ... that's just it—anyone else, but not me....

"Well, Stepan Nikiforovich, you didn't understand me, you see—here's an example for you, ready to hand!

"Oh, yes! We're always shouting about humaneness, but we're incapable of heroism, of real feats. What do I mean by heroism? Simply this: given the present relations between all members of society, for me, *me*, to go after midnight to the wedding of a subordinate, a registrar, with ten rubles a month, why, that would be madness, utter confusion of ideas, the last day of Pompeii, chaos! No one would understand it. Stepan Nikiforovich will not understand it to his dying day. Why, he said—we shan't be able to keep it up. Yes, but that's you, old folk, paralytics and retrogrades. *I'll* keep it up! I'll turn the last day of Pompeii into a day of bliss for my subordinate, an apparently crazy act into a normal, patriarchal, elevated and ethical one. How? Like this! Kindly listen!

"Well, then ... let us suppose I enter. They are astonished, the dancing stops, they stare at me, they

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

retreat a step. Very well, but here I do my bit. I go straight up to the terrified Pseldonimov with the most benevolent smile and say, in the simplest possible words: 'It's like this, you see, I was visiting His Excellency Stepan Nikiforovich. He lives quite near here, you probably know the address.' Well, and then I'll tell him in humorous terms of Trifon's truancy. From Trifon I'll go on to a description of my walk. 'Well, I hear music, question the policeman, and learn that you are getting married. Why not go to my subordinate's house, I think to myself, and see how my clerks make merry and ... get married. You won't drive me away, I suppose?' Drive me away! What a word for a subordinate. Drive me away—not likely! I think he'll go mad, rush headlong to seat me in an armchair, tremble with admiration, too overcome, at first, to take it all in!...

"Now what could be simpler or more elegant than such an act! What have I come for? That's another question! That is, so to say, the ethical side of the matter. And that's the whole beauty of it!

"Hm! What was I thinking about?

"Oh, yes ... well, of course, they'll seat me with the most important guests, some titular councillor, or a relative, some retired captain with a red nose.... Gogol describes those types marvellously. Well, of course I am introduced to the bride, I pay her a compliment, encourage the guests. I beg them not to be shy, to make merry, to go on dancing, I joke, laugh, in a word, I am genial and charming. I am always genial and charming when I am pleased with myself. Hm. But of course just now I am a little tipsy ... not drunk of course, but a little....

"Naturally, as a gentleman I treat them as equals, and by no means demand any special signs ... but morally, morally, that's another question. They will understand and appreciate ... my act will bring out all the magnanimity in them.... Well, I'll stay about half an hour—say an hour. I'll leave, of course, just before supper, they will bustle about, implore me, bow to the ground, but I will only drink one glass, congratulate them, and leave before supper. 'Business!' I'll say. And the moment I utter the word 'business' all their faces will become respect-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

fully grave. By this I give them a gentle hint that there is a great difference between them and me. All the difference in the world! Not that I wish to give this impression, but it is necessary ... even in the moral sense it is essential, whatever anyone says. I will smile, perhaps I'll even laugh, and then everyone will cheer up. Say something playful to the bride again. Hm—I know what I'll say—I'll hint that I shall come again in exactly nine months in the capacity of godfather, ha-ha! No doubt she'll bring forth punctually. They multiply like rabbits. Well, they'll all laugh, the bride will blush. I kiss her on the forehead with great feeling, even give her my blessing and ... and tomorrow my feat will be known at the office. Tomorrow I am again severe, tomorrow I am again exacting, inexorable, in fact—but now everyone knows the sort of man I am. They have seen into my soul, they know my value. 'He is a strict chief, but he is really an angel,' they will say. And so I have gained a victory. I have scored by a paltry act which would never have come into your head. They are mine now. I am their father, they are my children.... Now then, Your Excellency, Stepan Nikiforovich, see if you can do a thing like that!

"Do you realise, do you understand, that Pseldonimov will tell his children how the General himself made merry, how he actually drank at their father's wedding? And those children will tell *their* children, who will tell their grandchildren, as an anecdote hallowed by tradition, how a high official, a statesman (and by that time I shall be both these things) honoured their father ... and so on and so forth.... Why, I shall be raising the abased, morally speaking, I shall be giving him back to himself. Why, he gets ten rubles a month! And if I do this five times, ten times, or something like it, then I shall gain universal popularity.... It will impress itself on the hearts of all, and there's no knowing what might come of it, of that popularity!"

Thus, or almost thus, argued Ivan Ilyich. (What will not a man sometimes say to himself, gentlemen! Especially if he is in a somewhat eccentric state of mind.) All these considerations flashed through his mind in less than

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

a minute, and it goes without saying that he might have contented himself with these trivial meditations and, mentally putting Stepan Nikiforovich to shame, have gone quietly home and laid himself down to sleep. And he would have done well! But the whole misfortune lay in the fact that the moment was one of eccentricity.

As ill luck would have it, just at that very moment the smug faces of Stepan Nikiforovich and Semyon Ivanovich rose before his inflamed imagination.

"We shan't be able to keep it up," reiterated Stepan Nikiforovich smiling condescendingly.

"Hee-hee-hee!" echoed Semyon Ivanovich, with his most unpleasant smile.

"We'll see if we can't keep it up!" said Ivan Ilyich resolutely, the blood rushing into his cheeks. He stepped off the pavement and strode firmly across the street to the house of his subordinate, the registrar Pseldonimov.

Led on by his evil star, he passed boldly through the open wicket gate, scornfully kicking away the small shaggy mongrel which, more for the look of the thing than in real earnest, threw itself at his ankles with hoarse barks. He walked up the board path to a closed porch, which jutted out into the yard like a sentry-box, and ascended three dilapidated wooden steps to the tiny entry. Somewhere in a corner there burned a tallow candle-end or a night light of some sort, but this did not prevent Ivan Ilyich from plunging his left foot, galosh and all, in a meat jelly, set outside to cool. Ivan Ilyich bent down and, his curiosity aroused, noted that there were two other dishes there containing aspic or something, and two moulds as well—blancmange probably. For a moment he was taken aback by the sight of the wrecked meat jelly, and for the merest fraction of a second the thought came into his head: wouldn't it be better to beat an instant retreat? But he decided that this would be cowardly. Arguing that no one had seen him or would dream of suspecting him, he quickly wiped his galosh to destroy the traces, groped for the felt-covered door, opened it, and found himself in the tiniest of entrance halls. One half of it was literally heaped with overcoats, mantles,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

cloaks, capes, hats, bonnets, mufflers, and galoshes. In the other half the musicians were established—two fiddles, a flute and a double bass—four men altogether, picked up, of course, in the street. They were sitting at an unpainted deal table on which burned a solitary tallow candle, playing for all they were worth the last figure of a quadrille. Through the open door into the next room could be seen the dancers in a haze of dust, tobacco smoke, and fumes. A kind of frantic gaiety prevailed. There were guffaws of laughter, shouts and squeals. The gentlemen stamped like a cavalry squadron. Over this infernal din rose the commands of the master of ceremonies, who seemed to be quite at home and extremely free and easy. "Gentlemen in the middle, *chain des dames, balancez*," et cetera. Ivan Ilyich relieved himself of overcoat and galoshes in some trepidation and holding his hat in his hand went into the room. He no longer reasoned about anything.

Just at first nobody noticed him, all being absorbed in dancing the quadrille to the end. He stood there as if stunned, and could make out nothing in the crush. Ladies' dresses and young men with cigarettes between their teeth whirled past ... a lady's sky-blue scarf flew past and brushed against the tip of Ivan Ilyich's nose. A medical student, his hair streaming wildly, rushed after the lady, jostling Ivan Ilyich roughly as he passed. An officer as tall as a church steeple flashed past. Someone screamed, "Oh, Pseldy dear!" in an unnaturally shrill voice, flying by and stamping in time with the rest. The floor felt sticky to Ivan Ilyich's feet—it must have been polished with wax. There were up to thirty guests in the room, which was by no means a small one.

Another minute and the quadrille came to an end, and what Ivan Ilyich had imagined, what he had dreamed about while still outside the house, came to pass almost immediately. A kind of hum, a strange whisper, swept over the guests and the dancers who had not yet recovered their breath, nor wiped the sweat from their faces. All eyes, all faces turned swiftly towards the newly arrived guest. The moment after, all instantly backed away, tugging at the clothes of those who had not yet noticed him

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

and calling them to order. And these, too, looked round and immediately backed with the rest. Ivan Ilyich was still standing in the doorway, not having advanced a step, while between him and the guests a bigger and bigger space was cleared, littered with innumerable bonbon wrappings, scraps of paper, and cigarette stubs. Suddenly a young man in a frock-coat with untidy flaxen hair and a hooked nose stepped timidly on to this space. He advanced with drooping shoulders, gazing at the unexpected guest exactly as a dog gazes at its master when called to be kicked.

"How d'you do, Pseldonimov—know me?" said Ivan Ilyich, and immediately felt that he had said a stupid thing. He felt, too, that he was perhaps at that very moment making the most appalling blunder.

"Y-y-y-our Excellency!" murmured Pseldonimov.

"Ah-ha! I have come to you quite by chance, as you will probably realise yourself. . . ."

But Pseldonimov was apparently in no state to realise anything whatever. He stood there, his eyes bulging in the most appalling perplexity.

"Well, I suppose you won't drive me away—whether you like it or not, receive the guest!" continued Ivan Ilyich, feeling unpardonably weak with embarrassment, and trying vainly to smile, while the idea of bringing in the story of Stepan Nikiforovich and Trifon became more and more impossible. But Pseldonimov, to make matters still worse, did not recover from his paralysed state, and went on staring with an utterly imbecile air.

Ivan Ilyich winced, feeling that if he allowed things to go on like this another moment, the situation would be altogether desperate.

"I'm afraid. . . . Perhaps I'd better go!" he brought out faintly, and a muscle twitched on the right side of his mouth.

But Pseldonimov had already recovered his senses.

"Oh, Your Excellency . . . an honour . . ." he murmured, with a hurried bow. "Won't you sit down?" And finally recovering from his amazement he motioned with both hands towards the sofa, where the table usually stan-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

ding beside it had been moved to make room for the dancers.

With a feeling of relief Ivan Ilyich sank on to the sofa. Someone immediately dashed up and moved the table back to the sofa. Ivan Ilyich looked round and observed that he alone was seated, and that all the others, even the ladies, were standing up. A bad sign. But the time to mention this, to encourage, had not yet come. The guests were still retreating, and the only one standing beside him was the half-crouching Pseldonimov, still unable to understand anything and not smiling at all. In short, it was very unpleasant. At that moment our hero endured such agony that his idealistic excursion in the spirit of Harun al Rashid might in truth be considered a feat. But suddenly a small figure appeared beside Pseldonimov and began bowing. To his inexpressible pleasure, nay, to his delight, Ivan Ilyich recognised his head clerk Akim Petrovich Zubikov, a man with whom of course he was not acquainted outside the office, but whom he knew for an efficient and close-mouthed official. Ivan Ilyich rose at once and held out his hand to Akim Petrovich, his whole hand, not just two fingers. The latter took the hand in both his with an air of profound respect. The General was jubilant. The situation was saved.

For this made Pseldonimov, so to speak, no longer a second, but a third fiddle. Ivan Ilyich could address his story directly to the head clerk, of necessity treating him as an acquaintance, and that a close one, leaving Pseldonimov to hold his tongue and tremble from sheer reverence. Thus the proprieties would be observed. And the story must be told. Ivan Ilyich felt that. He could see that everyone was expecting something, that even the domestics were crowding into the two doorways, almost scrambling on to one another's shoulders, so as to see and hear. It was too bad that the head clerk, in his obtuseness, was still standing.

"Why don't you ..." blurted out Ivan Ilyich, awkwardly indicating a place beside him on the sofa.

"Oh, no! I'll sit here," and Akim Petrovich quickly sat down on a chair which Pseldonimov, who remained

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

persistently standing, leaned forward to thrust beneath him.

"Fancy, now!" began Ivan Ilyich, addressing himself exclusively to Akim Petrovich in a voice which, though shaky, was now quite free and easy. He drawled out his words, stressing every syllable, slurring his vowels, behaving, in a word, as he fully admitted to himself, in the most affected manner. He could not help it, he seemed to be impelled by some external force. He realised a great deal at that moment, and the realisation was agony.

"Fancy, now, I've just come from Stepan Nikiforovich Nikiforov, you've probably heard of him—he's a Privy Councillor. On that—er—commission. . . ."

Akim Petrovich bent his whole body forward respectfully, as if to say: Who hasn't heard of him?

"He's your neighbour now," continued Ivan Ilyich, addressing Pseldonimov for the sake of decorum and to show that he was quite at ease, but turning away hastily on reading in Pseldonimov's eyes his utter indifference to this.

"The old fellow, as you know, has dreamed all his life of buying a house. . . . Well, and so he bought one. And a very nice little house, too. Yes—and it happens to be his birthday today, and you see, he never celebrated it before, he even concealed it from us out of stinginess—ha-ha! But this time he was so pleased with his new house that he invited me and Semyon Ivanovich—Shipulenko, you know."

Akim Petrovich bent forward again with inexpressible zeal. Ivan Ilyich cheered up a little. He had begun to be afraid that the head clerk had guessed that His Excellency was for the moment in dire need of his support. And nothing could be worse than that.

"Well, there we were, the three of us, champagne on the table, talking about business. You know, one thing and another. . . . All sorts of problems. We even had a sort of argument . . . ha-ha!"

Akim Petrovich raised his brows respectfully.

"But that's not the point. I took leave of him, at last, the old fellow's very regular in his habits, goes to bed

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

early, you know, in his old age. I go out . . . my Trifon's nowhere to be seen! I am quite annoyed, and ask: 'Where has Trifon taken the carriage?' It appears that, hoping I would stay later, he had gone off to the wedding of some crony or sister of his. . . . God alone knows who! Somewhere here on the Petersburg Side. And he took the carriage along, while he was about it." Again the General looked towards Pseldonimov for the sake of propriety. The latter writhed beneath his glance, but this was not how the General had wanted him to behave. "No real sympathy, no heart," flashed through his mind.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Akim Petrovich, in profound amazement. A low hum of surprise ran through the crowd.

"Imagine my situation. . . ." (Ivan Ilyich glanced towards the assembled guests.) "Nothing for it, I go on foot. I'll stroll up to Bolshoi Prospekt, I think, and there I'll find a droshky, ha-ha!"

"Hee-hee!" echoed Akim Petrovich respectfully. Again a hum, this time of merriment, in the crowd. At that moment the chimney of a lamp in a wall bracket burst with a loud report. Someone rushed forward eagerly. Pseldonimov started and looked sternly at the lamp, but the General took no notice, and everyone breathed freely.

"On I go—and it's such a fine, still night. Suddenly I hear music, stamping, people dancing. I go up to the policeman—it's Pseldonimov's wedding, he says. Well, well, the whole Petersburg Side knows you are giving a ball, eh? Ha, ha!" he suddenly turned to Pseldonimov again.

"Hee-hee! Quite right!" responded Akim Petrovich. The guests stirred again, but the most embarrassing thing of all was that Pseldonimov, though he bowed again, still did not smile, just as if he were made of wood.

"Is he a fool, I wonder?" thought Ivan Ilyich. "If only he'd smile, the ass! We'd get on swimmingly." Impatience seethed within him. "So I thought to myself: Why shouldn't I go and see my subordinate, I don't suppose he'll drive me away—like it or not—receive the guest! You

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu
must excuse me, you know. If I'm in the way, I'll go.... I only just looked in...."

The guests were gradually coming to life. Akim Petrovich assumed an ecstatic air as if to say: How could Your Excellency be in the way? All the guests stirred and began to show the first signs of ease. Almost all the ladies were sitting down. A good sign, that. The bolder ones among them were fanning themselves with their handkerchiefs. One, in a worn velvet gown, purposely made some loud remark. The officer she addressed meant to answer her still louder, but since no one else was speaking loudly, he changed his mind. The men, mostly clerks and a few students, exchanged glances, as if urging one another to relax, began coughing, and even moving a step or two in various directions. As a matter of fact, nobody felt particularly shy, but they were all awkward, and most of them cherished feelings of secret hostility for the person who had burst in upon them to spoil their merriment. The officer, ashamed of his cowardice, began edging his way to the table.

"Look here, my good man, allow me to ask your name and patronymic?" Ivan Ilyich inquired of Pseldonimov.

"Porfiry Petrovich, Your Excellency," he replied, his eyes bulging, barking out the words as if he were answering a drill-sergeant.

"Aren't you going to introduce me to your bride, Porfiry Petrovich? Take me to her."

And he made as if to get up, but Pseldonimov rushed headlong into the drawing-room. The bride had been standing in the doorway, but as soon as she heard her name, she hid. A moment later, Pseldonimov led her up by the hand. Everyone made way for them. Ivan Ilyich rose solemnly and turned to her with a most courteous smile.

"Very glad to meet you, very," he said with a gracious inclination of his head. "Especially on such a day...."

He smiled archly. The ladies were pleasantly agitated.

"*Charmant*!" gasped the lady in the velvet gown.

The bride was a match for Pseldonimov. She was a thin

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

little lady, not over seventeen years of age, pale, with a tiny face and a sharp little nose. Her small eyes, darting from side to side, showed not the least embarrassment, on the contrary, there was a keenness tinged with malice in their expression. Pseldonimov must have chosen her for her looks. She wore a white muslin dress with a pink lining. Her neck was stringy, her body birdlike, her bones prominent. She could not say a single word in answer to the General's greeting.

"Why, she's very pretty!" he continued under his breath as if speaking to Pseldonimov alone, but loud enough for the bride to hear. But Pseldonimov answered not a word to this either, and this time did not even bow. Ivan Ilyich thought he could discern something cold and secretive in his eyes, something calculating and sinister. However, at all costs, his heart must be touched. That was what Ivan Ilyich had come for, after all.

"What a couple!" he thought. "And yet. . . ."

And he again turned to the bride, now seated on the sofa beside him, but to the two or three questions he put to her he received only a yes or a no, and not even that quite clearly.

"If she'd only blush," he said to himself, "then I could begin to joke. As it is, my position is an impossible one." Akim Petrovich, too, as if to spite him, kept silence, and though this was of course mere stupidity on his part, still it was inexcusable.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I hope I am not spoiling your pleasure!" he exclaimed to the room at large. He felt the palms of his hands were sweating.

"Oh, no! Don't worry about that, Your Excellency! We'll start again in a minute, we're just . . . cooling down," replied the officer. The bride glanced at him with approval. The officer was by no means old, and wore the uniform of some regiment or other. Pseldonimov still stood there, bending forward, and his hooked nose seemed to stand out still more prominently. He stood listening and looking, like a footman with an overcoat in his hands, waiting for the end of his master's farewells. Ivan Ilyich himself made this comparison. He began to lose his head, to feel awkward, terribly awkward, as if the ground were

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

slipping from under his feet, as if he had got into a place from which it was impossible to extricate himself, and had to grope in the dark.

Suddenly everyone made way for a stout, rather short woman, no longer young, dressed with no pretensions to gentility, but in her best, a great shawl pinned at her throat, and wearing a cap, to which she was obviously unaccustomed. She was carrying a small round tray on which stood a bottle of champagne, opened, but as yet untouched, and two glasses—neither more nor less. The bottle was evidently intended for only two guests.

The elderly woman went straight up to the General.

"Begging Your Excellency's pardon," she said, bowing. "But since you have deigned to do my son the honour of coming to his wedding, kindly do not refuse to drink the health of the happy couple."

For Ivan Ilyich she came as a deliverer. She was by no means an old woman, not more than forty-five or forty-six years of age. But she had such a good-natured, rosy, frank, round Russian countenance, her smile was so good-humoured, she bowed with such simplicity, that Ivan Ilyich almost cheered up and began to hope.

"So you are the parent of your son?" he said, rising from the sofa.

"The parent, Your Excellency," mumbled Pseldonimov, craning his long neck and once more sticking out his nose.

"Ah! Very glad to make your acquaintance, very glad!"

"Do take a glass, Your Excellency!"

"With the greatest pleasure!"

The tray was put down, Pseldonimov sprang to pour out the wine. Ivan Ilyich, still standing, took a glass.

"I am exceedingly glad, exceedingly glad, of this opportunity," he began, "to . . . to . . . express my . . . in a word, as your superior . . . I wish you, Madame" (he turned to the bride) "and you, my friend Porfiry, I wish you all prosperity and a lifetime of happiness."

He swallowed the contents of the glass, the seventh he had drunk that evening, with unction. Pseldonimov's look was grave, not to say morose. The General was beginning to hate him painfully.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"And that lanky fellow," he thought, glancing at the officer, "hanging about . . . why on earth doesn't he shout hurrah or something? Everything would begin to go smoothly then."

"And won't you drink their health, too, Akim Petrovich?" added the elderly woman, turning to the head clerk. "You are his chief, he is your subordinate. Look after my son, I beg you as a mother. And in future, dear Akim Petrovich, do not forget us, you are a good man."

"How delightful these old Russian women are!" thought Ivan Ilyich. "She's cheered everyone up. I've always loved the people. . . ."

Just then another tray was brought up to the table. It was brought by a girl in a rustling, as yet unlaundered chintz dress, draped over a crinoline. The tray was so huge, she could hardly get her arms round it. On it stood innumerable plates containing apples, bonbons, jujubes, walnuts, and so on. Till this moment the tray had stood in the drawing-room for all the guests, principally for the ladies. But now it was put down before the General alone.

"I hope Your Excellency will not scorn our humble refreshments," said the elderly woman, bowing.

"Oh, come!" said Ivan Ilyich, selecting a walnut, not without pleasure, and cracking it between his fingers. He had made up his mind to be democratic to the last.

Suddenly the bride giggled.

"Yes, Madame?" asked Ivan Ilyich with a smile, delighted at the sign of life.

"Oh, it's only Ivan Konstantinovich, sir, he says such funny things," she replied, dropping her eyes.

The General had already noticed a very good-looking, fair-haired youth, sheltering himself behind the back of the sofa, and whispering to Madame Pseldonimov. The youth rose to his feet. He was evidently very shy and very young.

"I was telling her about the dream-book, Your Excellency," he muttered half-apologetically.

"What dream-book?" asked Ivan Ilyich indulgently.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College of Education Bantalab Jammu

"There's a new dream-book, a literary one. I told her that if one dreams of Mr. Panayev, it means one will spill coffee on one's shirt-front."

"How naïve!" thought Ivan Ilyich irritably. The young man, though he had blushed violently while speaking, was unutterably glad to have been able to drag in his Panayev.*

"Yes, yes, I've heard about it," responded His Excellency.

"Oh, but there's a better one," said a voice quite close to Ivan Ilyich. "A new dictionary is coming out and they say Mr. Krayevsky will contribute an article on Alferaki ... and ... on *ablichitelnaya*** literature."

This remark came from a young man who was not a bit shy, but on the contrary, inclined to be familiar. He wore gloves and a white waistcoat and held his hat in his hand. He did not dance, but looked on superciliously, for he was a contributor to the satirical magazine *The Brand*, and set the tone, having come to the wedding quite by chance, invited as an honoured guest by Pseldonimov, the young men having made friends the year before, when they had starved together "in corners" let by a certain German woman. This youth did not mind a drink of vodka, and kept retreating to a certain back room, the way to which everyone knew. The General took an instant dislike to him.

"And the joke is, Your Excellency," suddenly interrupted the fair-haired youth who had told the story about the spilling of coffee, and whom the journalist in the white waistcoat was regarding with detestation, "that the writer pretends Mr. Krayevsky can't spell and thinks *oblichitelnaya* is spelt with an *a*."

But the fair-haired youth could hardly get to the end of his sentence. The look in the General's eyes showed that

---

* The reference is to "The Dream-Book of Modern Russian Literature", a parody on the editors of the progressive *Sovremennik*, Nekrasov and Panayev, circulated in manuscript by the author, the poet Shcherbin (1821-68).—*Ed.*

** A misspelling of *oblichitelnaya*—accusatory. Thus an illiterate English compiler might list the words *engine* and *ingenious* under the letter *e*.—*Ed.*

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

he had heard all this long ago, and that this very fact was embarrassing to him. The young man was covered with confusion. He slipped out of sight as soon as he could, and for the rest of the evening was extremely melancholy. The bold contributor to *The Brand* took his place, coming nearer, and evidently intending to take a seat quite close to the General. Such familiarity struck Ivan Ilyich as a little too much.

"But tell me now, Porfiry," he began, just for the sake of saying something, "I've been wanting to ask you for a long time, why are you called Pseldonimov and not Pseudonimov? Your name must surely be Pseudonimov."

"I cannot give you precise information as to that, Your Excellency," replied Pseldonimov.

"When his father first entered the service they probably muddled up the papers, and so now he remains Pseldonimov," explained Akim Petrovich. "It does happen."

"That's it!" said the General eagerly. "That's it, of course! For, judge for yourself—the name Pseudonimov comes from the literary word pseudonym. And Pseldonimov means nothing, you know."

"It arises from ignorance," added Akim Petrovich.

"What do you mean exactly by ignorance?"

"The Russian people. They sometimes change letters from ignorance. And sometimes they pronounce names in their own way. For instance, they say nivalid instead of invalid."

"I see, nivalid, ha-ha-ha!"

"They say mumber, too, Your Excellency!" burst out the tall officer, who had long been itching to distinguish himself.

"What d'you mean mumber?"

"Mumber, instead of number, Your Excellency."

"Ah, mumber instead of number. Very good, ha-ha-ha!" Ivan Ilyich was forced to giggle for the officer too.

The officer straightened his tie.

"And another thing they say..." began the journalist, but Ivan Ilyich chose not to hear: after all, he couldn't giggle for everyone.

Ivan Ilyich looked at him severely.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"What are *you* butting in for," Pseldonimov whispered to the contributor.

"I'm only talking! Can't I talk?" whispered back the other, but he held his tongue and went out of the room in a secret fury.

He went straight to the attractive back room where two sorts of vodka, salt herring, pressed caviare, and a bottle of strong sherry from the national cellar had been placed for the benefit of the men, who danced at the very beginning of the party, on a small table covered with an embroidered Yaroslavl table-cloth. He was pouring himself out some vodka with wrath in his heart, when suddenly the medical student with the untidy hair, the best dancer at Pseldonimov's ball, who knew the cancan, too, rushed in. He seized the decanter greedily.

"They're going to begin!" he said, helping himself hastily. "Come and look! I'm doing a solo on my hands and after supper I'll risk doing the fish-dance. It's really very appropriate for a wedding. A kind of friendly hint to Pseldonimov, so to say. Cleopatra Semyonovna's a darling, you can risk anything with her."

"He's a retrograde," replied the contributor morosely, drinking up.

"Who's a retrograde?"

"Why, that bigwig they put the sweetmeats in front of. A retrograde, I tell you!"

"Oh, you go on," muttered the student and rushed out of the room to the strains of the *ritournelle.*

Left to himself, the contributor poured out another glass for courage and independence, drank it up, and took a snack, and never had Ivan Ilyich, Councillor of State, acquired a more bitter enemy, or one more implacably bent on revenge—especially after a glass or two of vodka —than the contributor to *The Brand* he had taken such a dislike to. Alas! Ivan Ilyich never suspected anything of the sort. And there was another most important circumstance which he never suspected, but which had its influence on all further relations between the guests and His Excellency. The fact of the matter was that though he had given what he considered a plausible and even detailed explanation of his presence at his subordinate's wedding,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

this explanation had not really satisfied anyone, and the guests were still embarrassed. And then suddenly all was changed as if by magic. Everyone felt at ease again and was ready to make merry, to laugh, to squeal, and to dance, just as if the unexpected guest were not in the room at all. The reason for this was the rumour, the whispered information, which had in some inexplicable fashion got about that this guest was really a bit ... well, tipsy. And although at first it sounded like the most atrocious slander, it gradually gained credence so that suddenly the whole thing became perfectly clear, and everyone had an extraordinary sensation of freedom. At that very moment the quadrille began, the last before supper, in which the medical student had been so impatient to take part.

Ivan Ilyich had just made up his mind to speak to the bride again, intending this time to conquer her by some apt pun, when the tall officer flew up to her and went down on one knee. She immediately jumped off the sofa and fluttered away with him, to take her place in the ranks of the quadrille. The officer did not even apologise, and she did not so much as cast a glance at the General—she actually seemed glad to be rid of him.

"After all, she's well within her rights," thought Ivan Ilyich, "and one can't expect them to have manners."

"Hm. Don't stand on ceremony with me, Porfiry, old man," he said, turning to Pseldonimov. "Perhaps you have something to—see to—or—please don't mind me." ("What does he think he's doing—standing on sentry duty beside me?" he added to himself.)

Pseldonimov's long neck and piercing stare had become intolerable to Ivan Ilyich. In a word, all this was not a bit as he had pictured, though he was far from admitting this yet.

The quadrille began.

"Allow me, Your Excellency?" asked Akim Petrovich, holding the bottle respectfully in his hands, ready to tilt it over His Excellency's glass.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College of Education Bantalab Jammu

"I-I-I really don't know whether. . . ."

But Akim Petrovich was already pouring out the champagne with an expression of beatific radiance. Having filled the glass he poured some out for himself, furtively, thievishly, writhing and shrugging, with this difference, that he only filled his own glass up to the last half-inch, this seeming to him somehow more respectful. Seated beside his immediate superior, he felt like a woman in labour. And he could find nothing to talk about. It was manifestly his duty to entertain His Excellency, since he had the honour to bear him company. The champagne afforded a pretext, and besides His Excellency liked to have him pour out wine for him, not for the sake of the champagne itself, which was tepid and, of course, beastly, but simply for the moral satisfaction.

"The old chap wants to drink himself," thought Ivan Ilyich, "and he doesn't dare unless I do. Why not let him. . . . Besides it would be absurd not to drink, with the bottle standing between us."

He took a sip, and this seemed better than sitting there doing nothing.

"I am here," he began, spacing out and stressing his words, "I am here, so to say, by chance, and of course some may consider . . . that it . . . is . . . so to say, not quite proper for me to be present at such an . . . assembly."

Akim Petrovich said nothing, only listened with timid curiosity.

"But I hope you will understand why I am here—it wasn't really to drink that I came, you know. Ha-ha!"

Akim Petrovich would have liked to giggle with His Excellency, but for some reason could not, and once more found nothing consoling to say.

"I am here—to, so to say, to encourage—to show, so to say, the moral, so to say, aims," continued Ivan Ilyich, vexed at Akim Petrovich's obtuseness, and suddenly fell silent himself, after noticing that the unfortunate Akim Petrovich was lowering his eyes with a guilty air. The General, in some confusion, hastened to take another sip from his glass, and Akim Petrovich, as if his salvation lay in this, seized the bottle and filled up the glass.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

 Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab,Jammu

"You haven't very many resources," thought Ivan Ilyich, looking severely at the unfortunate Akim Petrovich. The latter, feeling the strict gaze of the General on his face, resolved not to say another word and not to raise his eyes. They sat on thus, vis-à-vis for two more minutes, two agonising minutes for Akim Petrovich.

A word or two about Akim Petrovich. He was as meek as a lamb, a man of the old school, reared in servility, and yet he was a worthy, not to say high-minded man. He was a Petersburg Russian, that is, his father and his father's father had been born and bred in Petersburg, had served there, and had never left the town. This is a very special class of Russians. They have not the slightest inkling of what is going on in Russia, and this ignorance causes them no concern. All their interests are confined to Petersburg, and, first and foremost, to the office they work in. All their worries concern *preference* for penny stakes, small shops, and their monthly wage. They know nothing of Russian customs and Russian songs, except *Luchinushka*, and that only because itinerant organ-grinders play it in the streets. There are, moreover, two important and invariable features by which you can immediately distinguish a real Russian from a Petersburg Russian. The first consists in the fact that all Petersburg Russians without exception say "Academic Gazette" and never "Petersburg Gazette". The second, equally important, is that your Petersburg Russian never uses the word breakfast, but always says *Frühstück*, with special emphasis on the *früh*. By these two essential distinguishing features you may always know them. In a word, this is a docile type which has finally crystallised during the past thirty-five years. Not that Akim Petrovich was by any means a fool. If the General had asked him about something within the sphere of his knowledge, he would have replied, and kept up the conversation, but it was improper for a subordinate to *ask* such questions, though Akim Petrovich was dying to know something more about His Excellency's present intentions.

Meanwhile Ivan Ilyich grew more and more thoughtful plunging into a sort of vortex of ideas. In his abstraction he kept taking sips from his glass the whole time, scarcely

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

noticing that he did. And Akim Petrovich kept zealously filling up his glass. Neither spoke. Ivan Ilyich had begun to watch the dancing, which all of a sudden attracted his special attention. There was a certain detail which quite astonished him.

The dancing was becoming very abandoned. The dancers threw themselves into it in the most single-minded manner, determined to enjoy themselves to the point of frenzy. Few of the men were expert dancers, but the clumsy ones stamped so violently that they could be taken for experts. The officer distinguished himself especially. He was particularly fond of figures in which he danced alone, a solo as it were. Here, his writhings were really remarkable—he stood straight as a pole, and then suddenly bent over sideways, as if he were going to fall; but the next moment he as suddenly bent over to the opposite side, forming an equally sharp angle to the floor. He preserved the utmost gravity of countenance, dancing in the full conviction that everyone was admiring him. Another cavalier fell asleep opposite his partner immediately after the first figure, having drunk his fill before the quadrille began, so that the lady was obliged to dance alone. The young registrar dancing opposite the lady with the blue scarf repeated the same trick again and again in all the five quadrilles that had been danced during the evening. Standing a little back from the lady, he caught the ends of her scarf and, while changing partners, seized the opportunity to shower a score or so of kisses upon it. The lady herself floated on before him, pretending not to notice anything. The medical student really did perform a solo on his hands, evoking wild enthusiasm, stamping and squeals of pleasure. In a word, the utmost freedom prevailed. Ivan Ilyich, whom the wine had affected, was just going to smile, when a bitter doubt began gradually to invade his soul. Of course he wanted them to be themselves, to feel at their ease. He had craved, yes craved, this atmosphere of familiarity and ease when they had all backed away from him, but now this familiarity was beginning to exceed all bounds. One lady, for example, in a worn blue velvet gown bought at fourth-hand, pinned up her skirt in the sixth figure, so that it looked as if she

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

wore bloomers. It was that very Cleopatra Semyonovna with whom one could risk anything, according to her partner the medical student. Of the medical student it could only be said that he was a veritable Fokine. But what did it all mean? First they back away, and then they suddenly become so free. Nothing reprehensible of course, but the transition had been rather abrupt. He felt a foreboding. They seemed to have forgotten the very existence of Ivan Ilyich. Of course he was the first to laugh and even risked applauding. Akim Petrovich giggled respectfully in unison with him, with obvious satisfaction, not for a moment suspecting that His Excellency was already nursing a new grudge in his heart.

"You dance very well, young man," Ivan Ilyich felt impelled to say to the student who came past, as the quadrille finished.

The student turned sharply towards him, grimaced, and, bringing his face impertinently near His Excellency's, crowed like a cock at the top of his voice. This was too much. Ivan Ilyich rose from the table. Despite this, a volley of unrestrained laughter followed, for the crowing was so very natural and the trick had been so unexpected. Ivan Ilyich was still standing there in bewilderment, when Pseldonimov himself came bowing up to him inviting him to the supper table. Behind him came his mother.

"Good sir ... Your Excellency ..." she said bowing, "do us the honour, do not scorn our humble repast."

"I ... I really don't know ..." began Ivan Ilyich. "It wasn't for that I came ... I ... was just thinking of taking my leave. ..."

He really did have his cap in his hand, indeed, at that very moment he had vowed to himself that whatever happened he would go and that nothing would make him stay, and—and he stayed. A minute later he was heading the procession to the table. Pseldonimov and his mother went ahead and cleared a way for him. He was seated in the most honourable place and again an unsealed bottle of champagne appeared next to his plate. There were snacks on the table—herring and vodka. He stretched out his hand, poured himself out a big glass of vodka and drank

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

it down. He was not used to drinking vodka. He felt as if he were rolling downhill, faster, faster, faster, he knew he must stop, hold on to something, but there was nothing.

His situation was becoming more and more eccentric. Indeed, there was something fatefully ironic in it. In the space of a single hour God knows what had happened to him. When he entered the house he had, so to speak, opened his arms to the whole of mankind and all his subordinates, and in less than an hour he was forced to admit, with grief in his heart, that he detested Pseldonimov and cursed him, his wife, and his wedding. And this was not all—he could see by Pseldonimov's face, by his eyes alone, that he detested him no less, that his look all but said: "To hell with you, damn you! Can't you get off my neck?" All this Ivan Ilyich had long read in Pseldonimov's glance.

Even now, as he sat down at the table, Ivan Ilyich would rather have had his hand cut off than admit, even to himself, that this was how matters really stood. The moment had not yet come, there was still a certain moral balance. But his heart, his heart . . . it ached. It longed for freedom, air, rest. You see, Ivan Ilyich was really too kind-hearted.

He knew very well that he should have left long ago, not simply left, but fled for his life. He knew that things had turned out not a bit as he had dreamed they would out in the street.

"What did I come for? Was it to eat and drink?" he asked himself taking a bite of herring.

His thoughts took an almost cynical turn. A momentary irony at the expense of his own feat stirred within him. He even began to wonder what, after all, he did come for.

"But how was I to leave? To go without finishing it would have been absurd. What would they say? They would say I had been haunting improper places. That's how it will appear if I don't finish it. What, for example, would Stepan Nikiforovich, Semyon Ivanovich, all those people at the office, those Shembels and Shubins say tomorrow (for it will surely get about)? No, I must leave in such a manner that everyone should understand what I

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

came for. I must make the moral purpose evident." But the opportunity to do so did not present itself. "They don't even respect me," he continued. "What are they laughing at? They're so unembarrassed, they seem so callous. Yes, I have long suspected the younger generation of callousness. I must stay at all costs! They've finished with their dancing and now that they've all gathered round the table I can mention problems, reforms, the greatness of Russia.... I'll win them over yet! I will! Perhaps nothing is lost, yet ... perhaps, it's always like that in real life. How am I to make a beginning, to win them over? What method should I employ? I am bewildered, quite bewildered ... and what do they want, what do they demand? I see they're laughing over there. Can it be at me, dear God? But what do *I* want? Why am I here? Why don't I go? What am I trying to achieve?" With these thoughts, something like shame, profound, intolerable shame ate deeper and deeper into his heart.

But everything took its course, one thing after another. Precisely two minutes after he had sat down to table, a frightening thought took hold of his entire being. He suddenly realised that he was terribly drunk, and not as he had been before, but hopelessly drunk. The cause of this was the glass of vodka following on the champagne, with immediate effect. He felt in his very being that he was falling into the last stages of weakness. He had a momentary access of Dutch courage, but his conscience gave him no peace, incessantly crying: "It's bad, it's very bad, it's simply disgraceful!" Of course the wavering drunken thoughts could not remain for any time at one point; two sides suddenly formed within him, so vividly as to be almost palpable. In one were bravado, the desire to conquer, to overcome obstacles, and the desperate certainty that he would yet attain his purpose. In the other, there was a nagging pain in his heart and a feeling that something was sapping his heart's blood. "What will people say? How will it all end? Tomorrow, oh, what will tomorrow bring?"

Up till then he had been dimly aware of the fact that he had enemies amongst the guests. "That's probably because I was drunk when I came," he told himself in an-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

guished doubt. And now to his horror he discovered, from certain indubitable signs, that he really did have foes at the table, that there could no longer be the slightest doubt about it.

"And what have I done to antagonise them?" he asked himself.

Around this table were seated all of the thirty guests, of whom several were already more than half-seas over. The others bore themselves with an air of careless, malicious independence, shouting, talking all together, proposing inappropriate toasts, and tossing pellets of bread at the ladies, who in their turn tossed them back. One man, an insignificant individual in a greasy frock-coat, fell off his chair the moment he sat down, and remained on the floor throughout supper. Another was determined to get on to the table and make a toast, and his premature enthusiasm was only moderated by the officer's hanging on to his coat-tails. The supper was a perfect medley of dishes, despite the fact that a chef, the serf of some general, had been hired. There were tongue and potatoes, meat jelly, cutlets and green peas, and, finally, a goose, with a blancmange to end up with. The drinks included beer, vodka, and sherry. A bottle of champagne stood beside the General's plate, from which he was forced to fill Akim Petrovich's glass, too, for the latter did not venture to extend his functions to the supper table. Cheap wine, or whatever they could lay their hands on, had been allotted to the rest of the guests for drinking toasts. The table itself was composed of a number of small tables placed on end, including even a card table, covered with odd table-cloths, one of which was a patterned Yaroslavl cloth. The ladies and gentlemen were seated alternately. Pseldonimov's mother would not sit down to table, and bustled about, giving orders. But there now appeared a sinister female who had not before shown herself, wearing a dress of reddish silk, a kerchief bound over a swollen cheek, and an extremely tall cap. She turned out to be the bride's mother, who had at last allowed herself to be persuaded to emerge from the back room for supper. Till now she had not appeared owing to her irreconcilable hostility to Pseldonimov's mother; but of this anon. She cast a disagreeable,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

not to say sarcastic look at the General, and evinced not the slightest desire to be introduced to him. Ivan Ilyich found this apparition extremely suspicious. But there were several other suspicious characters who inspired him with instinctive misgivings and anxiety. It even looked as if they were hatching a plot amongst them—against none other than Ivan Ilyich. At any rate that is how it seemed to him, and as the supper went on he became more and more convinced of it. The most suspicious of all was a bearded gentleman, apparently an artist of sorts; he kept looking from Ivan Ilyich to his neighbour and whispering in the latter's ear. Another guest, a student, though hopelessly drunk, also showed certain suspicious signs. There was something that boded no good about the medical student, too. Even the officer was not quite reliable. But it was the contributor to *The Brand* who glowed with particular and the most conspicuous hatred. He sat sprawling in his chair so insolently, looked around him so arrogantly, snorted with such an independent air. The other guests did not pay much attention to the contributor, who had only had four verses printed in *The Brand* and become a liberal on the strength of that; indeed they obviously disliked him; but when a pellet of bread suddenly fell quite close to Ivan Ilyich he could have sworn that the culprit was none other than the contributor to *The Brand*.

All this, of course, affected him in the most deplorable manner.

Ivan Ilyich made yet another extremely painful observation: he was beginning to pronounce his words indistinctly and with difficulty, and though there was a great deal he wanted to say, his tongue would not obey him. And a little later he fell to woolgathering, and, worst of all, snorting and laughing for no apparent reason, when there was nothing at all to laugh about. This phase passed soon after yet another glass of champagne which, though Ivan Ilyich had poured it out himself, he had not at first intended to drink, and then suddenly drank up as if by accident. After this, he felt almost like crying. He could see that he was falling into the most eccentric sentimentality. Once again he was moved by love, love for all, even Pseldonimov,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

even the contributor to *The Brand*. All of a sudden he wanted to embrace them all, to forget everything, to be friends with everyone. More—he wanted to open his heart to them, to tell them everything—what a nice kind man he was, and how talented, how useful he could be to his country, how he could amuse the fair sex and, above all, how progressive he was, how well-intentioned towards everyone, down to the very lowest; and finally, to reveal frankly to them all the motives impelling him to appear uninvited at Pseldonimov's house, to drink a couple of bottles of champagne there, and gladden him by his presence.

"Truth, sacred truth—above all, frankness! I will reach their hearts through my frankness. They will believe me, I am sure they will. Now they cast hostile glances at me, but when I tell them everything, I shall conquer them irresistibly. They will fill their glasses and drink my health with shouts of enthusiasm. The officer, I am certain of that, will break his glass against his spur. They may even shout 'hurrah!' Even if they should wish to toss me in the hussar manner, I should offer no objections, it would be a very good thing, indeed. I will kiss the bride on the forehead, she's a sweet little thing. Akim Petrovich is a very good man, too. Pseldonimov will, of course, improve in time. He lacks the polish of high society, so to say.... And though the whole of the new generation lacks that spiritual delicacy, still I'll ... I'll speak to them of the present mission of Russia among the other European powers. I will touch on the peasant question, too, yes, and ... and they will all love me, and I shall make a glorious departure!"

These dreams were of course very pleasant, but the sudden discovery in himself, amidst all these rosy hopes, of an unexpected tendency to spit, was not so pleasant. Spittle suddenly began to spurt from his mouth quite against his will. He first became aware of this when he noticed that he had bespattered Akim Petrovich's cheek and that Akim Petrovich, out of deference, had refrained from wiping off the spittle immediately. Ivan Ilyich picked up his napkin and wiped it away himself. But the next minute this struck him as so ridiculous, so far beyond the

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

bounds of common sense, that he fell silent, absorbed in astonishment. Akim Petrovich had had quite a lot to drink himself, but he was obviously perplexed. Ivan Ilyich now realised that for the last quarter of an hour he had been speaking to Akim Petrovich on the most interesting subject, and that Akim Petrovich, listening to him, seemed not only embarrassed, but actually afraid of something. Pseldonimov, who was sitting next but one to him, was also craning his neck towards him, his head on one side, listening with the most disagreeable expression on his face. He actually seemed to be watching him. Casting a glance over the guests, Ivan Ilyich observed that many of them were looking straight at him and laughing. Strangest of all, this did not embarrass him in the least, quite the contrary. He took another sip from his glass and began to hold forth for all to hear.

"I have just been saying, gentlemen!" he began, as loudly as he could, "I have just been saying to Akim Petrovich that Russia, yes ... Russia ... in a word, you understand what I am trying to say ... it is my profound conviction that Russia is now going through ... humaneness."

"Humane-ane-ness!" came from the other end of the table.

"Hoo-hoo!"

"Boo-boo!"

Ivan Ilyich hung fire. Pseldonimov rose from his chair and looked up and down—who had shouted? Akim Petrovich shook his head furtively as if to bring the guests to a sense of shame. Ivan Ilyich did not fail to observe this, but suffered it in silence.

"Humaneness!" he continued insistently, "and only a short time ago ... yes, a very short time ago I said to Stepan Nikiforovich.... Yes ... that ... that the renewal, so to say, of things...."

"Your Excellency!" came in a loud voice from the other end of the table.

"Your servant!" replied Ivan Ilyich, stopping short and trying to see who had called to him.

"Nothing at all, Your Excellency, I got carried away, proceed ... proceed," said the same voice.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Ivan Ilyich winced.

"The renewal, so to say, of those very things. . . ."

"Your Excellency!" shouted the voice again.

"Yes, sir!"

"Good day to you!"

This was too much for Ivan Ilyich. He broke off in the middle of a sentence and turned on the disturber of the peace. This was a very young student, extremely tipsy, obviously a most suspicious character. He had been yelling for some time, and had even broken a glass and two plates, declaring that it was the thing to do at a wedding. At the moment when Ivan Ilyich turned on him the officer was sternly admonishing the brawler.

"What are you yelling for? You ought to be turned out, that's all!"

"I didn't mean you, Your Excellency, I didn't mean you, Your Excellency, I didn't mean you! Go ahead!" shouted the tipsy schoolboy, lolling back in his chair. "Proceed! I'm listening and I'm very, very pleased with you! Most praiseworthy! Most praiseworthy!"

"Drunken brat!" whispered Pseldonimov.

"I can see he's drunk, but. . . ."

"I was telling him a very amusing story, Your Excellency," began the officer, "about an ensign from our platoon who spoke to his officer just like that. And now he's trying to imitate him. Whatever the officer said, he kept shouting 'Praiseworthy! Praiseworthy!' He was discharged from the service for it ten years ago."

"What ensign was that?"

"He was in our platoon, Your Excellency, he went mad on the word 'praiseworthy'. First they tried kindly measures, and then they put him under arrest. The officer admonished him like a father, and he kept answering 'Praiseworthy, praiseworthy'. And strange thing—he was a brave officer, over six foot tall. They meant to have him court-martialled, but then they saw he was crazy."

"He's only a schoolboy—one can treat skylarking indulgently . . . for my part I am ready to forgive. . . ."

"There was a medical examination, Your Excellency."

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"What! Did they a-nat-o-mise him?"

"Heavens no! He was perfectly alive."

A loud and almost general burst of laughter broke out among the guests, who had up till now behaved decently enough. Ivan Ilyich was furious.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" he shouted, at first hardly even stammering. "I am quite in a position to comprehend that a living man is not dissected. I supposed that in his madness he was no longer alive . . . I mean, he died . . . I mean, I wanted to say . . . you don't love me . . . and yet I love you all . . . yes, I even love Por-Porfiry. I demean myself by saying this. . . ."

At this juncture a huge drop of saliva spurted from the lips of Ivan Ilyich, bespattering the table-cloth in the most conspicuous place. Pseldonimov rushed to wipe it up with his napkin. This last misfortune utterly crushed Ivan Ilyich.

"Gentlemen, this is too much!" he cried in despair.

"When a man's drunk, Your Excellency . . ." ventured Pseldonimov once again.

"Porfiry! I see you . . . all of you . . . yes, I say, I hope . . . yes, I call upon everyone to say . . . how have I lowered myself in your eyes?"

Ivan Ilyich was almost in tears.

"Oh, Your Excellency!"

"Porfiry, I ask you . . . tell me, if I came . . . yes . . . yes, to your wedding, had I no purpose? I wished to elevate morally . . . I wished you all to be moved. I ask you all—have I or have I not lowered myself very much in your eyes?"

Dead silence ensued. Think of it—dead silence, and in reply to such a critical question! "Now, why, why couldn't they cry out at such a moment?" flashed through His Excellency's head. But the guests only exchanged glances. Akim Petrovich seemed more dead than alive and Pseldonimov, dumb with terror, stood repeating to himself the same awful question that had been worrying him for a long time:

"What will become of me after this, tomorrow?"

Suddenly the contributor to *The Brand*, already very drunk though up till now maintaining a morose silence,

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

CC-0. Mumukshu Bhawan Varanasi Collection. Digitized by eGangotri Central Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

turned straight to Ivan Ilyich and, his eyes flashing, answered him on behalf of the whole company.

"Yes," he cried in a voice of thunder, "yes, you *have* lowered yourself, yes, you are a retrograde—re-tro-grade!"

"You forget yourself, young man! Whom you are addressing?" cried Ivan Ilyich furiously, once more jumping up in his place.

"You! And in the second place I am not a young man . . . you came here to show off and seek popularity. . . ."

"Pseldonimov—what's the meaning of this?" cried Ivan Ilyich.

But Pseldonimov, after leaping to his feet, was too horrified to move and knew not what to do. The guests all seemed to be frozen to their seats. The artist and the student cried: "Bravo! Bravo!"

The contributor continued shouting in irrepressible fury:

"Yes, you came to boast of your humaneness! You interrupted the general gaiety. You drank champagne without thinking that it is too expensive for a clerk earning ten rubles a month, and I suspect that you are one of those superiors who have a taste for the young wives of their subordinates! More—I am convinced you are a supporter of redemption payments. You are, you are, you are!"

"Pseldonimov! Pseldonimov!" cried Ivan Ilyich, stretching out his hands towards him. Every word of the contributor's was like a knife in his heart.

"One minute, Your Excellency, please don't be distressed!" Pseldonimov cried resolutely, jumped at the contributor, seized him by the coat collar, and dragged him away from the table. No one could have expected such physical strength from the skinny Pseldonimov. But the contributor was extremely drunk and Pseldonimov was quite sober. He punched his guest on the back a few times and pushed him out of the room.

"Scoundrels—every one of you!" shouted the contributor. "I'll pillory you all tomorrow in *The Brand*!"

All leaped to their feet.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Pseldonimov, his mother, and a few of the guests crowded round the General with cries of: "Your Excellency! Your Excellency! Take no notice, Your Excellency!"

"No, no!" cried the General. "I am crushed—I came—I came here, so to say, to baptise . . . to bless. And this is what I get for it."

He sank into his chair as if unconscious, dropped his hands on the table, and leant his head on them, right in a plate of blancmange. It would be vain to attempt to describe everyone's horror. A minute later he rose, evidently desiring to go, swayed, caught his foot in the leg of the chair, fell flat on the floor, and snored.

This does happen to abstainers who take too much. To the very last moment they preserve their consciousness and then suddenly drop like a felled tree. Ivan Ilyich lay on the floor, dead to the world. Pseldonimov clutched at his hair and stood as if petrified. The guests began hurriedly dispersing, discussing the occurrence. It was about three in the morning by now.

The truth is that Pseldonimov's circumstances were a great deal worse than might have been supposed, even allowing for the unpleasantness of his present situation. And now while Ivan Ilyich is still lying on the floor, with Pseldonimov standing over him, clutching his hair in desperation, we may as well interrupt the course of our narrative and say a few explanatory words as to Porfiry Petrovich Pseldonimov himself.

Only a month before his marriage he had been literally perishing. He came from a gubernia where his father had occupied some post or other and died while on trial for some peccadillo. When, five months before his marriage, Pseldonimov, who had been starving in Petersburg for a whole year, obtained a job at ten rubles a month, he felt revived body and soul, but very quickly was brought low again by circumstances. There were only two Pseldonimovs left in the whole world, he and his mother, who had left the gubernia at the death of her husband. Mother and son shared the misery of the bitter cold, and fed on the most dubious substances. There were days when Pseldonimov went to the Fontanka with a mug, there to quench his thirst. When he at last found employment he and his

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College of Education Bantalab Jammu

mother rented a corner for themselves. She took in laundry, and he saved up for four months to get himself a pair of boots and an overcoat. And the suffering he endured at his office! His superior would come to him with the question—when was the last time he had been at the bathhouse? The rumour ran that bugs had made nests under his coat collar. But Pseldonimov had plenty of will-power: he looked very meek and quiet; his education had been of the scantiest, and he was hardly ever heard to express an opinion. I do not know for certain whether he thought, drew up plans and systems and cherished aspirations of any sort. Instead, an instinctive, indomitable and unconscious resolve to extricate himself from his position and get really started at last, had formed within him. He had an antlike tenacity—you may destroy the ants' nest and they will immediately build it up again, destroy it again, and they will start building again, and so on *ad infinitum*. His was a persevering, thrifty soul. You could see at a glance that he would make his way, build his nest, and perhaps even save something up. No one in the whole world loved him but his mother, he was the apple of her eye. She was a resolute, tireless, hard-working and for all that an extremely good-natured woman. They might have gone on living in their corner for another five or six years waiting for something to happen, if they had not encountered retired Titular Councillor Mlekopitayev, an ex-treasury clerk who had once served in their gubernia, and had lately settled down with his family in Petersburg. He knew Pseldonimov, whose father had once done him a good turn. He had a little money, not much, to be sure, but some. Nobody knew how much it really was, neither his wife, his eldest daughter, nor his relatives. He had two daughters, and, being a singularly crotchety old fellow, a drunkard and a domestic tyrant, and a sick man into the bargain, he took it into his head to have one of his daughters marry Pseldonimov. "I know him, his father was a good man, and the son will be a good man, too." When Mlekopitayev wanted to do a thing, he did it. He was a very eccentric tyrant. He spent most of his time seated in an armchair deprived by his disease of the use of his legs, which, however, did not prevent him from drinking. He

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

drank and swore for days on end. He was a spiteful man, and had to have someone near him whom he could torture incessantly. For this purpose he kept a few distant relatives in his home—his sister, an ailing, grumbling woman, two sisters of his wife, also bad-tempered scolds, and an old aunt, one of whose ribs had been broken in an accident. As well as these he kept another hanger-on, a lady of German extraction, for her gift for telling him stories from the *Arabian Nights*. His main pleasure consisted in tormenting all these unfortunate dependents, in cursing them incessantly although none of them, not even excepting his wife, who seemed to have been born with the toothache, dared to utter a word in protest. He set them at loggerheads among themselves, invented and spread gossip and laughed and rejoiced to see them all up in arms against one another. He was exceedingly glad when his elder daughter, who had lived for ten years in dire poverty with her officer husband, came to him as a widow with three small, ailing children. He detested the children, but since they provided him with additional material for his daily experiments, the old fellow was quite content. This crowd of bad-tempered women and sick children huddled together, with their tormentor, in the wooden house on the Petersburg Side. Half-famished, since the old man was stingy and doled out money a few kopeks at a time, though he never grudged the expense of vodka, they never had enough sleep, for the old man suffered from insomnia and wanted to be entertained. In a word, they all dragged out a wretched existence and cursed their fate. Just about this time Mlekopitayev happened to notice Pseldonimov. He was struck by his long nose and meek appearance. His sickly, plain younger daughter had just passed her seventeenth birthday. Though she had at one time attended a German *Schule*, she had gleaned little more from it than the elements of learning. Thereafter she grew up puny and scraggy, beneath the crutch of her drunken parent with his useless legs, in the hell of family tale-bearing, spying, and gossip. She had neither friends, nor brains. She had been dying to get married for a long time. Before strangers she was meek, but at home, at her mother's side, amongst the crowd of hangers-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

on, she was cross-grained and sharp as a gimlet. She loved to pinch her sister's children, knocking them about and telling on them if they stole sugar or bread, and so an endless, unquenchable quarrel existed between her and her elder sister. The old man himself offered her to Pseldonimov. Poor as he was, Pseldonimov asked to be given a little time for consideration. He and his mother pondered the question long. But the house was given as dowry. It was only a wooden, one-storeyed, ramshackle affair to be sure, but a house is a house. Besides this, she would have four hundred rubles, a sum that it would take a long time to save up. "What do you think I am taking a man into the house for?" shouted the drunken tyrant. "In the first place, because it's full of women, and I'm sick of women. I want Pseldonimov to dance to my piping, for I shall be his benefactor. In the second place, I am taking him because you are all against it, because it upsets you. I'm doing it to spite you. What I say I do! And you, Porfiry, beat her, when she's your wife. She has always had seven devils in her, from her very birth. Drive them all out, I'll get you a crutch!"

Pseldonimov said nothing, but he had made up his mind. He and his mother were taken into the house before the ceremony, washed, clothed, shod, and given money for the wedding. The old man probably did patronise them because his whole family hated them. He actually took a liking to Pseldonimov's mother, putting a constraint on himself, and not tormenting her. Pseldonimov he ordered to dance the *kazachok* for him a week before the wedding. "That'll do, I only wanted to see if you knew your place," he said at the end of the dance. He allowed the scantiest possible sum of money for the wedding, to which he invited all his own relatives and acquaintances. The groom only invited the contributor to *The Brand* and Akim Petrovich, the guest of honour. Pseldonimov knew very well that his bride hated the sight of him and she would have liked to marry the officer instead. But he bore it all, this was the resolution he and his mother had taken. All through the day of the wedding, and the whole evening the old man swore foully and drank. The family huddled into the back rooms, crowding there till they

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

were almost suffocated. The front rooms were set aside for the ball and the supper. At last, at about eleven o'clock, when the old man, dead drunk, had gone to sleep, the bride's mother, who had been exceptionally disagreeable to Pseldonimov's mother all day, decided to let bygones be bygones and attend the ball and the supper. The appearance of Ivan Ilyich spoilt everything. Mlekopitayev's wife was embarrassed, took offence, scolded everyone for not having warned her that a real live General had been invited. Everyone tried to assure her that he had come uninvited, but she was not going to believe that. Champagne had to be sent for. Pseldonimov's mother had only a single ruble, and he himself had not a kopek. Pseldonimov had to grovel before his mother-in-law and ask her for money first for one and then for another bottle of champagne. He implored her to think of his relations with his superiors, his career—and appealed to her conscience. At last she gave Pseldonimov the money, but made him eat such humble pie that, more than once, rushing into the tiny room in which the bridal bed had been prepared, and, silently clutching at his hair, he threw himself face down on the bed appointed for heavenly delights, trembling with impotent rage. Ah! Ivan Ilyich had no idea what the two bottles of champagne drunk by him that evening had cost! Imagine Pseldonimov's horror, grief and even despair, when the whole thing ended as it did. Once more there was trouble ahead, and perhaps for the whole night, the squeals and tears of the captious bride, the reproaches of her idiotic relatives. His head ached as it was, and impenetrable gloom was already dimming his vision. And now here was Ivan Ilyich requiring aid, a doctor must be sought at three in the morning, or a carriage to take him home, and it must be a private carriage, such an important personage could not be sent home in his present condition in an ordinary droshky. And where was the money for the carriage to come from? The bride's mother, furious because the General had not said a word to her and had not so much as looked her way during supper, declared that she hadn't another kopek. Perhaps she really hadn't. Where was the

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

money to come from? What was to be done? Oh, there was good reason to tear one's hair!

In the meanwhile Ivan Ilyich was carried to the little leather couch in the dining-room. While the tables were being cleared and taken apart, Pseldonimov rushed about trying to borrow some money, even asking the servants, none of whom, however, had any. He actually risked troubling Akim Petrovich, who had stayed behind the rest. But he, though a good-hearted man, was thrown into such perplexity, not to say terror, at the mention of money, that he could only utter the most incoherent nonsense.

"Another time I'd do it with pleasure . . ." he muttered, "but now—I'm afraid I. . . . You must really excuse me."

And picking up his cap he hastened out of the house. The only person who turned out to be of any use was the kind-hearted youth who had talked about the dream-book, and even he was not much good. He had stayed behind the rest, out of heartfelt sympathy for the sorrows of Pseldonimov. At last Pseldonimov, his mother, and the youth conferred together and decided, rather than send for a doctor, to fetch a carriage and take the patient home, and for the moment, till the carriage should come, to try certain home remedies on him, such as bathing his temples and head with cold water, putting ice on his head, and so on. Pseldonimov's mother undertook to do all this. The youth sped off to look for a carriage. Since there were not even any droshky to be found on the Petersburg Side at this hour, he went to a cabmen's inn on the outskirts of the town, and roused them. They bargained, insisting that even five rubles would not be enough for a carriage at this time of night. At last, however, one of them agreed to take three rubles. But when just before four o'clock the youth arrived at the Pseldonimovs' in a hired carriage, the plans had long ago been changed. It appeared that Ivan Ilyich, who was still unconscious, was so ill, he tossed and moaned so piteously, that it was quite impossible, if not dangerous, to move him. "And who knows what might come of it?" Pseldonimov, utterly discouraged, asked himself. What was to be done? Another

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

problem arose: if the patient was to be left in their house, where was he to be put? In the whole house there were only two beds—a huge marital couch on which Mlekopitayev slept with his spouse, and a newly-purchased double bed of imitation walnut, intended for the newly-weds. All the other inhabitants slept on the floor, huddled together on feather mattresses which were in a deplorable state, they stank and were altogether indecent objects, and anyway there were only just enough of them to go round, if that. Where was the patient to be put? A feather mattress could no doubt have been found—for that matter one could have been dragged from beneath some sleeper, but where was it to be laid and on what? The best place was found to be the living-room, since it was farthest from the haunts of the family, and had a separate entrance. But where was a mattress to be put? Surely not on chairs? Everyone knows that only schoolboys have beds made up for them on chairs when they come home for Saturday and Sunday, and this would have been very disrespectful to a person like Ivan Ilyich. What would he say tomorrow, when he waked up and found himself sleeping on chairs? Pseldonimov would not hear of it. There was only one thing left—to put him in the bridal bed. This bridal bed, as we have already stated, stood in a tiny room off the dining-room. On it was a newly-purchased double mattress, on which nobody had yet slept, clean sheets, and four pink calico pillows in ruched muslin cases. The eider-down was a pink satin, elaborately stitched. Muslin curtains were threaded through a gilt ring overhead. In a word, everything was very proper, and the guests, almost all of whom had found their way to the bedroom, had been loud in their praises. Much as the bride detested Pseldonimov, she had several times in the course of the evening tiptoed furtively in to steal another look at the bed. What then was her indignation, her fury, when she learned that this guest who had fallen ill with something almost like cholera, was to be placed in her bridal bed! The bride's mother tried to stand up for her, swearing loudly and threatening to complain to her husband the very next day. But Pseldonimov put his foot down and insisted on having his own way. Ivan

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Ilyich was put in the bridal chamber, and a mattress was laid upon chairs for the married couple. The bride whimpered, was ready to pinch everyone, but dared not disobey. Papa had a crutch with which she was very familiar and she knew he would be sure to demand a detailed report regarding certain matters the next day. To console her the pink eider-down and the muslin-covered pillows were brought into the living-room. It was at this moment that the youth arrived in the carriage. Learning that it was no longer needed he was seized with terror. He would have to pay for it himself and he never yet had a ten-kopek piece to call his own. Pseldonimov declared his utter bankruptcy. Attempts were made to pacify the cabman, who, however, began shouting and banging on the shutters. How it all ended I cannot say. Apparently the youth took himself in the carriage as a hostage to 4th Rozhdestvensky Street, where he hoped to arouse a student spending the night with some friends, and see if he had any money. It was past four in the morning by the time the newly-weds were left alone, locked up in the room. Pseldonimov's mother watched by the bedside of the sufferer all night. She lay on a rug on the floor, covering herself with her old coat, but could not sleep, as she had to get up constantly—Ivan Ilyich had a terrible attack of diarrhea. Courageous and magnanimous old soul that she was, she undressed him with her own hands, tending him as if he were her own son, carrying the necessary utensil to and from the bedroom along the passage all night. But the misfortunes of this night were not over by a long chalk yet.

Hardly ten minutes had passed since the young couple had been locked up in the room, when the most heart-rending shriek was heard, a shriek not of joy, but of the most ominous nature. This was followed by a thud, a crash, and a noise as of chairs falling, and in a moment the dark room was invaded by a crowd of gasping, terrified women in all stages of deshabille. These women were: the bride's mother, her elder sister, leaving her sick children for the moment, and her three aunts, including

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

the one with a broken rib. Even the cook was there, even the German hanger-on, the one who told fairy-tales, whose very own mattress, the best in the house and constituting her entire property, had been dragged from under her by force, and given to the newly-weds, came to see what was the matter. All these worthy and perspicacious women had been stealing out of the kitchen and tiptoeing along the passage and listening in the hall for the past quarter of an hour, devoured by irresistible curiosity.

In the meanwhile somebody hastily lit a candle and a most unexpected sight was revealed to all. The chairs, unable to bear the double weight, and only supporting the mattress at the edges, had shifted, and the mattress had fallen between them on to the floor. The bride was whimpering with rage. This time she was cut to the quick. The stricken Pseldonimov stood there like a criminal caught red-handed. He did not even attempt to defend himself. Moans and squeals came from all sides. Pseldonimov's mother, hearing the noise, came running up too, but this time the bride's mamma scored a total victory. She began by showering Pseldonimov with strange and for the most part unjust reproaches such as: call yourself a husband after that? what's the good of you after such a disgrace? and so on, till at last, taking her daughter by the hand, she led her away from her groom, taking upon herself the responsibility of answering the irate father, when he demanded a report next morning. They all poured out after her, exclaiming and nodding their heads. No one was left with Pseldonimov but his mother, and she attempted to console him. But he drove her away instantly.

He was not to be consoled. Staggering over to the couch he sat down and gave himself up to the most sombre meditations, barefooted, and wearing only the most necessary undergarment. The thoughts chased one another in confusion through his brain. Sometimes he cast a mechanical glance around the room where so recently the dancers had made such wild merriment, and where the air was still laden with cigarette smoke. The filthy floor, wet in spots, was still littered with bonbon papers and cigarette stubs. The ruin of the bridal bed and the over-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College of Education Bantalab Jammu

turned chairs bore witness to the vanity of the best and surest earthly hopes and dreams. He sat on like this for almost a whole hour. Nothing but the darkest thoughts such as: what was he now to expect at the office? came into his head. He realised in anguish that he would have to find another job at all costs, for it would be impossible to stay on at the old one after what had happened tonight. The thought of Mlekopitayev came into his head—Mlekopitayev, who would no doubt force him tomorrow to dance the *kazachok* again, to test his docility. He thought, too, that though Mlekopitayev had given him fifty rubles for the wedding, all of which to the last kopek had been spent, not a word had been said as to handing over the promised four hundred rubles' dowry, and even the house had not yet been formally registered. Then he went on to think of his wife, who had abandoned him in the most critical moment of his life, and of the tall officer kneeling on one knee in front of her. He had seen that all right. He thought of the seven devils dwelling in her, on the evidence of her own father, and of the crutch prepared to drive them out. He felt capable of enduring much, it is true, but fate was playing such tricks on him that he could well begin to doubt his own strength.

Thus grieved Pseldonimov. In the meantime the candle-end burned quite low. Its flickering light, falling straight on Pseldonimov's profile, cast an enormous shadow on the wall—a craning neck, a hooked nose, and two tufts of hair, one sticking out over his forehead, the other on the back of his head. At last, when the morning freshness began to steal into the room, he got up, shivering and stunned, tottered over to the mattress between the chairs, and, without setting anything to rights, putting out the candle, or so much as placing a pillow beneath his head, flopped on the tumbled bedclothes and slept the leaden, deathlike slumber probably known to men condemned to public execution on the morrow.

But what could compare with the night of torture spent by Ivan Ilyich Pralinsky on poor Pseldonimov's bridal bed! Headache, nausea, and other unpleasant sensations

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

did not leave him for a moment at first. He went through the torments of hell. His consciousness, though it scarcely flickered in his brain, lit up such depths of horror, such gloomy and loathsome scenes, that it would have been better if he had remained quite unconscious. However, his thoughts were still confused. He did recognise Pseldonimov's mother, he heard her kindly admonitions: "Bear it, dearie, bear it, you'll get used to it!" and yet though he recognised her he could not give himself any logical reason for her presence beside him. Foul spectres appeared before him—the most frequent was Semyon Ivanovich, but gazing more intently he observed that it was not Semyon Ivanovich at all, but Pseldonimov's nose. The artist, the officer, the old woman with the swollen cheek, all flashed swiftly by. What occupied his thoughts most of all was the gilt ring overhead, through which the curtains were threaded. He could make it out clearly by the dim light of the candle-end, and kept asking himself: "What's that ring for, why is it here, what does it mean?" He asked the old woman about it several times, but he must have said something quite different from what he wanted to say, and she could not understand him, try as he might to explain. At last, just before daybreak, the attacks ceased and he slept, slept soundly and dreamlessly for about an hour. When he waked up it was almost in full consciousness, with an intolerable headache, a horrible taste in his mouth, and a tongue that felt like a bit of flannel. He sat up in bed, looked round, and tried to think. The pale light of dawn was struggling through the chinks in the shutters, and lay in an ever widening strip on the wall. It was about seven o'clock in the morning. But when Ivan Ilyich realised where he was and remembered all that had happened that night, when he remembered the incidents at the supper table, his frustrated attempt at a heroic feat, his speech; when the consequences of all this, what would be said and thought, appeared before him with appalling vividness in a single flash, when he looked around and saw the wretch and hideous mess he had made of his subordinate's peaceful bridal bed—oh, then such shame, such agony suddenly visited his heart that he cried out, covered his face with his

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

hands, and threw himself back on the pillow in despair. A minute later he leaped out of bed, saw his clothes on a chair, neatly folded and cleaned, seized them and began putting them on, hurrying and casting terrified glances over his shoulder. On another chair lay his coat and cap, his tan gloves placed in the cap. He wanted to steal away unnoticed, but suddenly the door opened and old Pseldonimov came in, bearing an earthenware bowl and a china basin. Over her shoulder hung a towel. She put down the basin and told him that he had got to bathe his face.

"You must wash, sir, you can't go away unwashed."

At that moment Ivan Ilyich realised that if there was a creature in the world before whom he could feel at ease and fear nothing, it was this elderly woman. He washed. Long after, in moments of depression, he would remember, among other causes for remorse, everything about this awakening, the earthenware bowl, the china basin full of cold water, in which there still floated icicles, and the oval cake of soap in its pink wrapping, with the letters indented on its surface, worth about fifteen kopeks and no doubt purchased for the young couple, but which Ivan Ilyich was fated to be the first to use ... and the elderly woman with the linen towel over her left shoulder.... The cold water refreshed him, he dried himself, and, without saying a word, without so much as thanking his nurse, seized his hat and coat, held out to him by Pseldonimov's mother, and ran through the passage, through the kitchen where the cat was mewing and the cook, raising herself on her mattress, looked after him with eager curiosity, rushed out into the yard, to the street, and hailed a passing droshky. It was a frosty morning and a cold yellowish fog covered all the houses and other objects. Ivan Ilyich raised his coat collar. He felt as if everyone were looking at him, everyone knew who he was, recognised him....

For eight days he did not leave his house or appear at his office. He was ill, dreadfully ill, morally rather than physically. During those eight days he lived through the horror of hell, and they must have been credited to his

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

account in the next world. There were moments when he actually thought of going into a monastery. There really were! His imagination took to wandering in that direction. He heard low, subterranean singing, saw an open grave, visualised life in a solitary cell in a forest or a cave. But returning to his senses, he immediately admitted to himself that all this was pure nonsense and exaggeration, and was ashamed of it. Then began moral torments from the thought of his *existence manquée*. Then shame again rose within his heart, filling it completely, scorching it, rubbing salt into his wounds. He trembled at the pictures that passed before him. What would they say of him, what would they think when he went back to the office, what whisperings would haunt him for a whole year, ten years, his whole life? The story would be handed down to posterity. He had moments of panic when he was ready to go to Semyon Ivanovich and beg his pardon, his friendship. He did not even seek to justify himself, he castigated himself incessantly. He could find no excuses for his conduct, he would have been ashamed to look for them.

He even thought of instantly handing in his resignation and devoting himself to the happiness of mankind, just like that, in solitude. In any case he would have to change all his acquaintances and that, in such a way as to erase all memories of himself. Then the idea came to him that this was nonsense too, and that everything could be put right by treating his subordinates with greater severity. At such moments he would feel hopeful and begin to cheer up. After eight whole days of doubt and torture, he felt he could no longer bear the suspense, and *un beau matin* decided to go to the office.

While he was still at home, in dejection, he had tried a thousand times to imagine how he would enter the office. In terror he became convinced that he would hear ambiguous whispered remarks as he passed, see ambiguous countenances, glean malevolent smiles. What was his astonishment when none of this happened. He was met respectfully, bowed to. All were grave, all busy. His heart filled with joy and he made his way to his private office.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Once there, he immediately plunged into serious business, listened to a few reports and accounts, gave instructions. He felt he had never reasoned or argued so wisely, in such a business-like manner, as on that morning. He saw that he gave satisfaction, that he was appreciated, that he was treated with respect. The most sensitive vanity could not have noticed anything wrong. All went splendidly.

At last Akim Petrovich himself appeared with some papers. At the sight of him Ivan Ilyich felt a stab at his heart, but this was only for a moment. He discussed the matter in hand with Akim Petrovich, held forth pompously, showed him what to do, and explained everything to him. He noticed however that he seemed to avoid letting his eyes rest long on Akim Petrovich or, rather, that Akim Petrovich was afraid to look at him. But now Akim Petrovich had finished and was beginning to gather up the papers.

"There is one more request," he began, trying to sound completely matter of fact. "Registrar Pseldonimov asks to be transferred to the department.... His Excellency Semyon Ivanovich Shipulenko has promised him a place. He requests your favourable assistance, Your Excellency."

"Ah, so he wants to be transferred," said Ivan Ilyich, feeling an enormous load lifted from his shoulders. He glanced at Akim Petrovich and for a moment their eyes met.

"Very well ... for my part ... I will endeavour ..." replied Ivan Ilyich. "I am quite willing."

Akim Petrovich seemed anxious to get away as quickly as possible. But Ivan Ilyich, in a fit of generosity, decided to express himself finally. Once more he was visited by an inspiration.

"Tell him," he began, fixing a clear glance of profound significance on Akim Petrovich, "tell him I bear him no grudge. Yes, I bear him no grudge. That, on the contrary, I am quite ready to forget the past, to forget all, all...."

But Ivan Ilyich suddenly checked himself, observing with astonishment the strange behaviour of Akim Petrovich who, from having been a rational man, suddenly appeared for some unknown reason to have become the

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

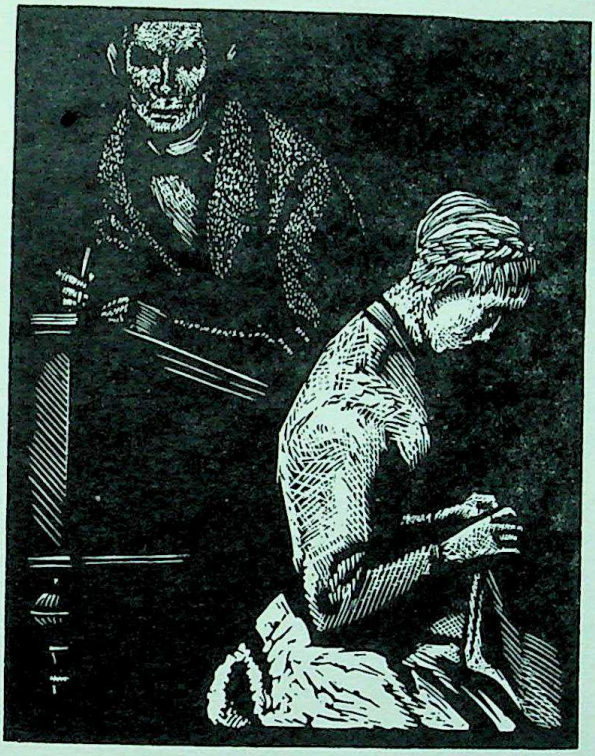
Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

most appalling fool. Instead of listening respectfully, he blushed like an imbecile, began with almost indecent haste to perform a series of little bows while backing towards the door. He looked as if he would like to fall through the earth, or at least to get back to his seat as soon as possible. Left alone, Ivan Ilyich rose in some perturbation from his chair. He looked in the glass without seeing his reflection.

"No—severity, and again severity," he whispered almost unconsciously, and suddenly a bright red flush suffused his whole face. At that moment he felt more deeply ashamed, more wretched, than he had felt in the very worst moments of his eight-day illness. "Couldn't keep it up!" he said to himself, and sank helplessly on to his chair.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu



THE MEEK ONE

A Fantasy

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Author's Note

Will my readers forgive me for offering them just a short novel on this occasion rather than a regular instalment of the "Diary". But this short novel has really kept me busy for the best part of a month. In any case, I crave my readers' indulgence.

Now for the story itself. I have called it a fantastic story, whereas I personally consider it highly realistic. There is, however, a fantastic element in it, that is, in the very composition of the story, and this, I think, needs to be explained beforehand.

The fact is that this is neither a narrative nor a collection of notes. Imagine to yourself a husband whose wife has committed suicide only a few hours ago by jumping out of the window. Her body is laid out on the table. He is confused and has not arranged his thoughts. He is pacing his rooms, trying to take in what has happened, and "bring his thoughts to a focus". The man, it must be said, is an inveterate hypochondriac, one of those who talk to themselves. And so he is talking to himself, going over what has happened and trying to take it all in. Despite his seeming coherence he often contradicts himself both in his logic and his feelings. He both justifies himself and accuses her, then goes into irrelevant explanations: coarseness of heart and mind is mingled with depth of feeling. By degrees he does take it all in and "focuses his thoughts". A train of memories he has called up bring him at last irresistibly to the *truth*, and truth irresistibly ennobles his heart and mind. Towards the end the very tone of his narrative becomes different from its incoherent beginning. The truth is revealed to the poor man quite clearly and definitely, sufficiently for himself to see at least.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

So much for the theme. The telling of the story, of course, takes a few hours in breaks and snatches; it is disconnected in form, for he either argues with himself or addresses some unseen listener, a judge as it were. However, it is always like that in real life. If a stenographer could have listened to him and taken it all down, it would have sounded rather less smooth and finished than my account, but I do believe that the psychological sequence would have probably been the same. Now this hypothetical stenographer (whose notes I have given shape to) is what I call "fantastic" in my story. However, something of the sort has been allowed in literature before: Victor Hugo, for instance, in his masterpiece *Le Dernier Jour d'un Condamné* resorted to almost the same medium, and though he portrayed no stenographer he made it even less credible by assuming that a man sentenced to death was able (and had sufficient time) to make notes not only of his last day on earth, but also of his last hour and, actually, his last minute. Were it not for this fantastic situation, however, the work itself would not have been written —the most realistic and the most truthful of all his books.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

PART ONE

I

WHO I WAS AND WHO SHE WAS

...While she is still here it is not so bad: I can come up and look at her every minute, but they'll take her away tomorrow, and what will I do all alone then? She is in the front room now, on the table, they've put two card tables together, the coffin will be ready tomorrow, very, very white *gros de Naples*, oh, but I'm rambling.... I'm walking up and down, up and down, trying to take it all in. I've been trying for six solid hours but I just cannot focus my thoughts. The thing is that I keep walking up and down, up and down.... This is what happened. I shall simply give the order of events. (Oh, order!) Gentlemen, I am far from being a writer, as you can see for yourselves, but never mind, I shall tell it the way I understand it. But the appalling part of it is that I do understand it all!

Well, if you want to know, or rather to begin at the beginning, she simply came to me to pawn her things in order to pay for her advertisement in *The Voice* that she was a governess seeking employment, had no objection to travelling, was willing to give private lessons, and so on and so forth. That was the very beginning, and naturally I did not single her out from among the others: she just came in like everyone else and that was that. I did single her out later, however. She was so thin, so sweetly fair, above medium height, always rather awkward with me and embarrassed as it were. (I think she was like that with all strangers, and certainly I meant as little to her as the next man, that is, taken as a man and not a pawnbroker.) The minute she received her money she would turn away and leave. She never uttered a word. Other clients argue so, begging and haggling for more, but she would accept anything.... I believe I'm getting con-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

fused. . . . Oh yes, what struck me first was the things she brought: gold-plated silver ear-rings and a trashy little locket—all worthless trinkets. She knew they were worthless, but her expression told me that to her they were precious—and indeed that was all her father and mother had left her, as I afterwards learnt. Only once did I permit myself to sneer at her things. That is, you see, I never permit myself to do it, for I am always the gentleman with my clients: reticent, polite and stern. "Stern, stern and again stern." However, she was once presumptuous enough to bring the remnants (literally the remnants) of an old rabbit-fur jacket, and I was tempted to say something rather facetious to her. Goodness, how she had blushed! Her eyes were blue, big and dreamy, but the way they had blazed up! She did not utter a word, but picked up her "remnants" and walked out. That was when I noticed her *particularly* for the first time, and thought something of the sort about her, I mean something of a particular sort. Oh yes, I remember another impression, or rather, if you like, the main impression, the synthesis of everything: that is, that she was awfully young, she looked about fourteen. And yet she was already sixteen then, three months short of sixteen. That's not what I was going to say, the synthesis was not that at all. She came again on the morrow. I found out afterwards that she had taken her rabbit jacket to Dobronravov and Moser, but those two accept nothing but gold, and so they would not even talk to her. I, on the other hand, once accepted a cameo from her (very third-rate too), and my own action surprised me when I thought it over: I never took anything but gold and silver either, and yet, in her case, I had stooped to a cameo. That was the second time I thought about her, I well remember.

On that occasion, that is after she had been to Moser, she brought me an amber cigar-holder, not too bad if one went in for that sort of thing, but once again of no value to us for we only deal in gold. Since this was the day following her *revolt*, I met her sternly. With me sternness means dryness. However, when I handed her the two rubles I could not desist from saying with something like peevishness: "I'm only doing it *for you*. Moser would

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

never accept a thing like this from you." I stressed the words *for you* particularly, and in a *particular sense* too. I was annoyed. She blushed again at this *for you*, but said nothing; she did not throw the money back at me, but took it—that's poverty for you! Oh, how she had blushed! I had hurt her pride, I knew. When she left I suddenly asked myself: was my triumph over her really worth two rubles? Ha-ha-ha! I remember asking myself that question twice: was it worth it? was it worth it? And, laughing, I answered myself in the affirmative. I had a jolly good laugh then. There was no malice in it, however. I had a motive, my action had been intentional: I had wanted to test her, for suddenly my mind had begun to work in a certain direction about her. That was my third *particular* thought about her.

...Well, that was how it all began. Needless to say, I immediately set to finding out all about her on the quiet, and awaited her coming with particular impatience. I had a feeling that she would be back soon. When she did come I engaged her most politely in a pleasant conversation. I have not been badly brought up, you know, and my manners are good. Hm.... It was then I perceived that she was gentle and meek. The gentle and the meek have poor resistance, and though they do not shed their reserve at all, they simply cannot evade a conversation: they answer curtly but answer they do, and the more you ask the more they say. The important thing is to keep it up, if you're interested, that's all. She naturally told me nothing about herself on that occasion. It was later that I found out all about *The Voice* and everything else. She had been using up her last resources on the advertisements then, wording them haughtily at first: "Governess seeking employment, no objection to travelling, state your terms by letter", and then: "willing to take any employment, teacher, companion, housekeeper, sick nurse and seamstress", etc., etc., the usual story. The advertisement was reworded by degrees of course, and finally, when she was close to despair, it actually said: "no salary expected, board only". But no, she found no employment. I decided to put her to the final test then, and picking up that day's *Voice* I pointed out to her an

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab, Jammu

advertisement that said: "Young lady with no family ties seeks employment as children's governess, preferably with an elderly widower. Will take on household duties."

"There, you see, advertising this morning and most probably securing a post by tonight! That's the way to advertise!"

She blushed and her eyes blazed up again. Turning away, she walked out at once. I liked it very much. However, I was already quite confident and bold: no one else would accept her cigar-holders. And even her cigar-holders had run out. I was right: she came back two days later looking very pale and upset—I guessed that she had had some trouble at home, and she really had. I shall explain directly what the trouble had been, but first I want to recall how I suddenly cut a figure for her benefit then and thus went up in her estimation. I did it on the spur of the moment. The thing is that she brought in that icon of hers to pawn that day (was driven to bringing, rather).... Ah, listen, listen! I shall be telling it properly now, I keep confusing everything. What I mean to say is that I want to recall it all now to the last detail, to the least little thing. I keep striving to focus my thoughts and I can't, it's all those little things, little things.

It was the icon of the Holy Virgin with the Child, an old family icon with a gold-plated silver riza, and the value was, say, six rubles. I could see that the icon meant a great deal to her, for she wanted to pawn it intact, without removing the riza. I said to her: "You'd better leave the riza with me and take the icon home, because, after all, pawning an icon is not quite the thing."

"Why, don't your rules allow it?"

"No, it's not the rules, I only thought that perhaps for you...."

"Very well, take it off."

"Look, I shan't take it off, I'll put it in the icon case over there," I said after some thought, "with the other icons behind the icon-lamp (I've always kept one burning, ever since I first set up business). I'll simply let you have ten rubles on it."

"I don't need ten; just give me five, I shall redeem it for sure."

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"Don't you want ten? The icon is worth it," I added, noticing her eyes flash again. She said nothing. I handed her the five rubles.

"Do not despise people," I said. "I've been in straits like this myself, even worse perhaps, and if you see me thus engaged now . . . it is only because of all I had gone through. . . ."

"Revenging yourself on society, are you?" she suddenly interrupted me with this rather caustic remark which, however, had much that was guileless in it. (I mean it was innocent of guile generally, for she certainly did not distinguish me from the crowd then, and so there was almost no sting to her words.)

"Aha!" I thought. "So that's what you're like! There's evidence of character, tinged with new shades. . . ."

"You see," I quickly put in half-jokingly and half-mysteriously, "I am part of that whole which wants to do evil but does good. . . ."

She quickly turned on me a look of vast curiosity which was much like a child's.

"Wait a minute . . . whose words are they? Where is it from? I've heard it somewhere. . . ."

"Don't rack your brains, it was Mephistopheles presenting himself to Faust with these words. Have you read *Faust*?"

"Not . . . not carefully."

"In other words not at all. You ought to read it. But then I see your lips are curving scornfully again. Please do not think me so lacking in taste that I should attempt to cover up my role of pawnbroker by presenting myself to you as a Mephistopheles. A pawnbroker will always remain a pawnbroker. I know that well enough."

"You are strange, really. . . . I didn't mean anything like that. . . ."

She wanted to say: "I did not expect you to be an educated man." She did not say so but I knew the thought was there; she was very pleasantly surprised.

"You see," I said, "one can do good in any walk of life. I do not mean myself of course. I, for one, do nothing but evil, but then. . . ."

"To be sure one can do good in any position," she said

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

 Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab, Jammu

with a swift and understanding glance at me. "Yes, in any position," she suddenly added. Oh, how well I remember all those moments! I also want to add that when the young, our dear young people, want to say something very clever and understanding, their faces express all too sincerely and naïvely: "There, I'm saying something clever and understanding to you now." This does not spring from conceit as with people like me; you can see that they value it all so highly, believe and esteem it all, and they fancy that you, too, esteem it just as much as they do. Ah, sincerity! It's their truest weapon. And in her it was so charming!

I remember it all, I have forgotten nothing. When she walked out, my mind was instantly made up. That same day I set out to conclude my investigations and find out all the remaining, current secrets of her life. I had learnt all the earlier secrets from Lukerya, a servant of theirs at the time, whom I had bribed a few days earlier. Those secrets were so shocking that I fail to understand how she could bring herself to laugh and be curious about Mephistopheles' words when her own predicament was so horrible. But that's youth for you! It was precisely this I thought of her then, with pride and joy because there was magnanimity in this as well, as much as to say: "I may be on the brink of ruin, but Goethe's great words are refulgent." Youth is always attended by magnanimity, be there ever so little of it, or be it misdirected. I mean her, her alone. The main thing was that I was already regarding her as *mine* and had no doubts of my power. Do you know it's a most delicious feeling when you're no longer in doubt.

But what am I about? If I carry on like this I'll never focus my thoughts. Oh hurry, hurry, it's all beside the point, oh heavens!

II

PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE

I shall explain the "secrets" I found out about her in a word: her father and mother had died three years previously, and she was left with some shiftless aunts. To

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

call them shiftless would be putting it too mildly. One was a widow with a large family; six children she had, each smaller than the next one. The other was a spinster, old and bad. Both were bad. Her father had been in the civil service, just a clerk though, and his nobleman's rank was a personal award, nothing more. In short, all this was playing into my hand. I came to them from a higher world, so to say: after all, I was a retired junior captain of a splendid regiment, a nobleman by birth, a man of independent means and so on; as for the pawnshop, her aunts could feel nothing but respect for it. She had been kept in slavery by her aunts for three years, yet she had passed her school exams somewhere—she had managed to do it, escaping from her cruel drudgery to do it—and that surely proved her yearning for better and nobler things! Look, the reason I wanted to marry her.... However, never mind me, that will keep.... And does it matter? She taught her aunt's children, made their clothes, and towards the end she not only had to wash for them but also scrub the floors, with lungs like hers! To put it plainly, they actually beat her and grudged her her keep. They ended up by wanting to sell her. Ugh! I'll leave out the sordid details. She told me all about it afterwards. A fat shopkeeper from next door had been watching all this for a whole year. He was no ordinary shopkeeper, for he owned two grocery shops. He had already driven two wives into the grave, and was now on the look-out for a third. "She's quiet, brought up in poverty, and I'm marrying for my orphans' sake," he reasoned. He really did have children who wanted looking after. He made his suit, he and her aunts began to make arrangements (incidentally, he was fifty), and she was in a panic. That was when she started coming to me in order to pay for her advertisements in *The Voice*. Finally, she begged her aunts to give her time to think it over, even if only a tiny moment. They agreed and granted her a moment, but only one, they refused a second, and made her life a misery. "An extra mouth to feed when we've nothing to eat ourselves." I knew all that already, and on that day, after the morning's conversation, my mind was made up. In the evening the shopkeeper came to call on her, bringing a

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

fifty-kopek pound of sweets from the shop; there she was sitting with him, while I called Lukerya out of the kitchen and told her to whisper in her ear that I was waiting at the gate and had something urgent to say to her. I was well pleased with myself. On the whole, I was awfully pleased all that day.

There and then at the gate, in Lukerya's presence, I told her—adding to her amazement at being called out by me at all—that I should be happy and honoured if.... Next, I asked her not to be surprised at my manner and my proposing at the gate; I told her that I was a straightforward man and was well aware of the circumstances. And I was straightforward, that wasn't a lie. Oh, bother it.... My speech was not only decent, which is proof of my good breeding, but also original, and that is the main thing. Oh well, why think it wrong to admit it? I want to judge myself and I do. I must speak *pro* and *contra* and I do. I know it's stupid, but even afterwards I delighted in recalling it; I told her straight out, without any embarrassment, that for one thing I was not particularly gifted or clever, not even particularly kind perhaps, and something of a cheap egoist (I remember that expression, it had occurred to me on my way there and I liked it), and it was quite possible that there was much that was unpleasant in me in other respects as well. I said all this with a peculiar sort of haughtiness—we all know how such things are said. It goes without saying that I had sufficient good taste to forebear listing my good points after making a clean breast of my shortcomings: "but to make up for that I have this and that", so to say. I could see that she was terribly afraid still, but I did not tone down anything; on the contrary, seeing that she was afraid I purposely made it harsher: I told her straight out that she would have enough to eat, but as for fancy clothes, theatres and balls, there would be none of that, unless later perhaps when I had attained my goal. I was quite carried away by this sternness of mine. I added, as casually as I could, that though I was thus occupied, running a pawnshop that is, I was only striving for a goal, that there were certain circumstances.... But I did have the right to say it: I really did have a goal and certain circumstances. Just

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

a moment, gentlemen, I've hated the pawnshop all my life more than anybody else could, and though it really is absurd to talk to oneself in veiled phrases, I was really "revenging myself on society", I was, I was, I was! And so her thrust that morning about my "revenging myself on society" was unfair. That is, you see, were I to tell her frankly: "Yes, I am revenging myself on society", she would have laughed the way she had done that morning, and it would have really sounded absurd. Besides, I saw that I could play on her imagination with a vague hint here and a mysterious sentence there. What was more, I already feared nothing then; I knew that the fat shopkeeper was in any case more repulsive to her than I, and that I was her liberator. I did appreciate that, you know. Oh, man is particularly good at appreciating vile opportunities. But was it vile of me? How judge a man? Did I not love her even then?

Just a minute: I naturally did not so much as hint at being her benefactor then; oh, no, on the contrary, I told her it was *I* who was indebted and not *she*. I actually put it in words; I couldn't help it, and it may have sounded silly because I did notice a fleeting change of expression on her face. But on the whole I was definitely the winner. Look here, once I am recalling all that sordidness, let me recall the last bit of caddishness as well: I was standing there with this running through my mind: "I'm tall, well built, well bred, and, bragging aside, I'm not bad-looking." Such were the thoughts exciting my brain. Needless to say, she said "yes", even there at the gate. But . . . but I must add: she stood at the gate thinking for a long time before she said "yes". She was so lost in thought that I was about to say "Well?" but I could not keep the swagger out of my tone and said: "Well then?"

"Wait, I'm thinking."

And her sweet face was so grave, I should have been able to read it even then! But I was vexed, thinking: "Can she be choosing between me and the shopkeeper?" Oh, I did not understand anything then. I understood nothing, nothing at all. I understood nothing until today. I remember Lukerya running after me when I had turned to go, stopping me and saying with a gasp: "God will

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

reward you, kind sir, for taking our dear miss, but don't you tell her this, she's proud."

Oh, she's proud, is she! I like proud little girls. The proud are especially good when ... well, when you no longer doubt your power over them, eh? Oh, what a vile, coarse man I am! Oh, the pleasure it gave me! Do you know, when she was standing there at the gate thinking hard before saying "yes" to me, which I found puzzling enough, do you know what she may have been thinking in fact? "Since it's misery here and misery there, isn't it best to choose the worst at once, that is the fat shopkeeper, let him beat me to death when he's drunk and the sooner the better." Eh? Tell me, could she have been thinking that?

But even now I don't understand it, I understand nothing even now! I have just said that she may have been thinking she should choose the worst of the two evils, that is the shopkeeper. But which one of us appeared worse to her then, the shopkeeper or I? A shopkeeper or a pawnbroker who quoted Goethe? It's quite a question. What question? Don't you understand even that much? There's your answer lying on the table, so what question could there be? And then, bother me anyway. The point is not myself at all.... Incidentally, what do I care now whether the point was myself or not? That's something I absolutely cannot solve. Perhaps I should go to bed. My head aches so....

III

THE NOBLEST OF MORTALS, THOUGH I DON'T REALLY BELIEVE IT

I could not fall asleep. How could I with that pulse throbbing in my brain. I want to take it all in, all that sordidness. Oh, sordidness! The sordidness I rescued her from then. Surely she ought to have understood and appreciated my action? I also indulged in various pleasing thoughts such as the notion that she was only sixteen while I was forty-one. This disparity fascinated me; it was gratifying, most gratifying.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

I wanted our wedding to be *à l'anglaise*, that is just the two of us with two witnesses, one of whom should be Lukerya, and then straight into the train and off to Moscow perhaps (incidentally, I had some business to attend to there), to a hotel for a fortnight or so. She objected to this; she would not allow it, and I was compelled to pay courtesy calls on her aunts, the way one does on parents whose daughter one seeks in marriage. I conceded the point to her, and the aunts received their due. I went so far as to give those hags a hundred rubles each, promising more to come, telling her nothing of all this of course, so as not to offend her with the vileness of the whole affair. The aunts instantly turned meek and mild. We also had an argument about her trousseau: she had nothing, almost literally so, but then she wanted nothing. I managed to prove to her, however, that it was not done, and I provided the trousseau, for who else would have done it? Oh, bother me. I did tell her at the time, however, about some of my ideas to give her an inkling at least. I was rather hasty about it perhaps. The main thing was that from the very first, though she tried to curb the impulse, she offered her love to me impetuously, welcoming me eagerly when I came to call in the evening, prattling happily (charming, innocent prattle!) about her childhood and babyhood, her parents' home, her father and mother. But I instantly dashed cold water on all that rapture of hers. It was dictated by the idea I had, you see. I responded to her transports with silence, gracious silence of course . . . but still, she soon grasped that we were different, and that I was an enigma. And to be an enigma was what I was striving for mostly. My whole stupid attitude was maintained for that very purpose. First and foremost —sternness. I kept it up until after the wedding. In short, even though I was satisfied then, I evolved a whole system. Oh, it took shape without any effort on my part. But then I could not have acted differently, I was compelled to evolve that system because of one extraordinary circumstance—but really, why am I piling calumny upon myself? The system was correct. No, no, listen to me, because you must know the circumstances if you are to pass judgement on a person. . . . Listen.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

I don't know how to begin because it is all so difficult. It's difficult when one begins to plead one's own case. You see how it was; youth despises money, for instance, and so I instantly made much of money, I laid stress on money. I did it so tellingly that she grew more and more silent. She opened her great eyes wide, listened, looked, and grew silent. You see, young people are magnanimous, that is to say good young people are magnanimous and impetuous, but they lack tolerance, and the moment anything falls short of what they expect, they turn scornful. And I wanted broad-mindedness, I wanted to implant broad-mindedness right in her heart, in her heartfelt point of view, do you see? I'll give you a vulgar example: how was I to explain my pawnshop to one such as she? I naturally did not blurt it all out to her, for then it would have appeared that I was making excuses for my pawnshop, and so I resorted to proud silence, so to say, I practically spoke in silence. I am a past master at speaking in silence. I have spent a lifetime speaking in silence, I have lived through whole dramas in silence alone with myself. Oh, but I too have known unhappiness. I have been discarded by all, discarded and forgotten, and no one, no one at all knows about it. And then for that slip of a girl to pick up that gossip about me from certain cads and to believe that she knew everything, while everything that mattered remained locked in this breast alone! I kept silent, I kept pointedly silent with her all the time until yesterday—why did I? Because of my pride. I wanted her to find out for herself, without my prompting and certainly not from the cads' stories, I wanted her *to perceive the man I was* by herself, and understand me. Since I was bringing her into my home I wanted her absolute respect. I wanted her to stand in awe of me for my sufferings—it was my due. Oh, I have always been proud, I've always wanted all or nothing. It was precisely because I rejected half-measures in happiness and wanted all that I was forced to take that attitude: "find out for yourself and appreciate my worth". Because you must agree that had I gone into explanations of my own accord, prompting her, cringing and pleading for respect, it would have been the same as begging for alms. However, why speak of all that?

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

It's stupid, stupid, stupid! I explained to her frankly and cruelly then (I stress the word cruelly), in a few words, that magnanimity in the young was charming but not worth a thing. Why wasn't it? Because it was cheaply acquired, granted to them before they began to live; it was nothing but "life's first impressions" so to say, but I'd like to see them practise it first. Cheap magnanimity is always easy, laying down one's life is cheap too, because it's nothing but young blood and vigour seeking an outlet, a passionate desire to do something handsome. Oh no, try your magnanimity in a feat that is difficult, unseen and unheard, with no splendour to it, attended instead with calumny and great sacrifice, and not a drop of glory —a feat when you, radiantly pure, are exposed as a cad before the world whereas there is no one equal to you in honesty on earth—I'd like to see you try a feat like that, but no, you would back out of it. And I—my whole life has been nothing but a feat like that. She argued with me at first, oh, so hotly, and then she began to say less, grew completely silent and only opened her eyes terribly wide listening to me, such big observant eyes. And . . . and what was more, I suddenly caught a smile upon her face, a mistrustful, silent, bad smile. She wore that smile when I brought her into my home. It's also true that she had nowhere else to go. . . .

IV

PLANS, NOTHING BUT PLANS

Which of us two had started it first?

Neither. It all started of itself at the very outset. I have already told you that I affected sternness when I brought her into my home, but I toned it down immediately. She had it explained to her before the wedding that she would take my place in the pawnshop, accepting things in pawn and handing out the money, and she had made no objection then (note this). What is more, she actually tackled the job with zeal. Well, naturally, the rooms and the furniture all remained unchanged. There were two rooms: one was the large front room with the pawnshop parti-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

tioned off, and the other, also large, was our room—bed- and living-room. The furniture was poor; even her aunts' was better. My icon stand with the icon-lamp was in the front room where the pawnshop was; in the other I had my bookcase with a few books in it, my chest of which I kept the keys, and then the bed, tables and chairs, of course. I told her before the wedding that I was allowing a ruble a day and no more for our food, that is, hers, mine and Lukerya's, whom I enticed away from the aunts; I explained that I had to save thirty thousand in three years, and this was the only way to do it. She raised no objection, but I increased the allowance by thirty kopeks of my own accord. It was the same with the theatre. I told her before the wedding that there would be no theatre-going, and yet I went and allowed it once a month, decently too, in stalls. We went three times and saw the *Pursuit of Happiness* and *Singing Birds*, I think it was (oh, bother it, bother it!). We went in silence and returned in silence. But why, why did we affect silence from the very first? There were no quarrels at first, you know, but still we were silent. In the beginning I remember, she had a way of glancing at me stealthily; the moment I noticed it I stressed our silence. It's true that it was I who overdid the silence, and not she. As for her, she had one or two outbursts when she threw herself into my arms; but since the outbursts were morbid and hysterical, while I wanted solid happiness, respectful on her part, I responded coldly. And I was quite right, for these outbursts were inevitably followed by a quarrel the next day.

That is, there were no quarrels, but silence again, and more and more insolence in her expression. "Revolt and independence" was what it implied, only she did not know how to go about it. Yes, her meek expression took on more and more insolence. Truly, I was becoming loathsome to her; I made a study of it, you know. And then of course there was no doubt that her outbursts carried her away. For instance, how could she suddenly start sneering at our poverty after the filth and misery she had come from, floor scrubbing and everything? You must see that it was not poverty, but economy, and where necessary there was even luxury—in linen, for instance, and clean-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

liness. I had always imagined that cleanliness in a husband appealed to a wife. It was not poverty she scoffed at, however, but my alleged stinginess. "So he has a goal, has he, he's showing off his strength of character." She suddenly cancelled our theatre-going herself. And her scornful expression grew more and more pronounced ... and I grew more silent, more silent.

After all, why make excuses for myself? The crux of the matter lay in the pawnshop. But look here, I knew that a woman, a sixteen-year-old girl at that, could not help becoming completely subjugated to a man's will. There is no originality in women, that's self-evident; it's evident to me even now. What if she is lying on the table there? Truth is truth and even Mill himself could do nothing about it. And a loving woman, oh, a loving woman will idolise the vices, even the crimes, of the man she loves. He himself would never think of such excuses for his crimes as she will find for him. It's magnanimous but not original. It's lack of originality alone that has been the undoing of women. What of it, I repeat, what if you do point to that on the table over there? Why, is there any originality in that which is on the table? Oh! Oh!

Listen: I was certain of her love then. She did come flying to me and threw herself on my neck, didn't she? Therefore she loved me, or rather—she wanted to love. Yes, that was it: she wanted to love, longed for someone to love. What is more, there was no such crime in evidence here for which she would have had to find excuses. A pawnbroker, you say, and everyone says. What if I am a pawnbroker? Obviously, there must be reasons why the most magnanimous of men had become a pawnbroker. You see, gentlemen, there are certain ideas ... that is, you see, certain ideas which, if put into words, would sound terribly stupid. You'd shrink with shame. Why? Just so. Because we all are rotten and cannot stand the truth, or I don't know why else. I have just said "the most magnanimous of men". It sounds funny, and yet it really was so. It's the truth, you know, the most truthful truth. Yes, I *had the right* then to want to have some security and to open this pawnshop. "You have cast me aside, you—that is people—have driven me away with your scornful silence.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

When, passionately impulsive, I appealed to you, you reciprocated with an insult to last me a lifetime. And therefore I am justified in walling myself in away from you, saving my thirty thousand rubles and ending my days in the Crimea somewhere, on the south coast, in the mountains and vineyards, on my own estate bought with this thirty thousand, and what is more, away from all of you, but without bearing you malice, carrying an unblemished ideal in my soul, with the woman I love close to my heart, and a family—God willing—spending my days in helping the neighbouring villagers." It's all right, of course, saying all this about myself now, but would it not have been the utmost folly to have enlarged upon this out loud to her then? Therefore the proud silence, that's why we lived in silence. Could she have understood? Sixteen, youth's awakening—what could she have made of all my excuses, my sufferings? Straightforwardness, no worldly wisdom, youth's cheap convictions, purblindness of "noble hearts", but the deciding factor in this was the pawnshop, and there you are! (But was I a villain in my pawnshop? Did she not see the way I ran it? Did I ever drive unfair bargains?) Oh, how terrible truth is in this world! This darling, this meek one, this heavenly one—she was a tyrant who cruelly tormented my soul. I would be wronging myself if I did not say that. Do you think I did not love her? Who is there to say that I did not love her? You see, it was a wicked irony of fate and nature. We are the accursed, altogether there is a curse on the life of men (mine particularly). I do understand now that I had been wrong somewhere. Something went wrong somewhere. It had all been clear, my plan was as clear as the skies: "Stern and proud, a man who has no need of anyone's moral support or consolation and is suffering in silence." It really was so. No, I wasn't shamming, I wasn't! "She would see for herself afterwards that there was magnanimity in this, only she had failed to notice it, and then, when she did see it, she would appreciate it tenfold and, clasping her hands to her breast in entreaty, would be reduced to dust." So much for my plan. But there must have been something I had left out of account or had forgotten to do. There was something I ought to

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

have done there and did not. But enough, enough. And whose forgiveness should I beg now? Once it's over, it's done with. Courage, man, think of your pride! You are not to blame!

Very well, I shall speak the truth, I shall not shrink from facing the truth: *she* was to blame, *she* was to blame!

V

THE MEEK ONE REVOLTS

Our quarrels began with her suddenly taking it into her head to determine the loans in her own way, overvaluing the things brought in pawn, and once or twice actually treating me to an argument on the subject. I stood my ground. And then this captain's widow turned up.

An old woman, a captain's widow, came to pawn a locket, her late husband's gift, the usual sort of souvenir. I gave her thirty rubles. She began to whimper and whine, begging me not to let it go—well, of course, I shouldn't. Suddenly, five days later, she came back bringing a bracelet that wasn't worth eight rubles as a substitute; I refused, quite naturally. My wife's eyes must have told her something because she came again when I was out and had her locket exchanged for the bracelet.

On learning of it the same day, I spoke to my wife gently, but firmly and reasonably. She was sitting on the bed, staring at the floor and tapping the rug with her right foot (a habit of hers); an evil smile hovered on her lips. And then, without raising my voice at all, I calmly told her that the money was *mine*, that I had the right to *my own* point of view, and that I had concealed nothing from her as she well knew when I first proposed that she should share my home.

All at once she leapt up, shaking all over, and—would you believe it—suddenly began to stamp her feet at me. She was a wild beast; it was a fit; she was a wild beast in a fit. I was speechless with amazement: an outburst like that I had never expected. But I did not lose my presence of mind; I did not so much as stir, and once again, in the same calm voice, I told her straight out that I would not

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

allow her to take part in my business forthwith. She laughed in my face and walked out of the flat.

The point of this is that she had no right to leave the flat. Not a step without me, I had made that condition before the wedding. She came back towards evening: I did not say a word.

Early next morning she went out again, and the following day again. I locked up my pawnshop and went to see her aunts. I had severed all relations with them immediately after the wedding, neither receiving them nor calling on them. I was only to learn that she had not been there. They heard me out with great curiosity and then laughed straight into my face. "Serves you right," they said. But I was expecting their laughter. I lost no time in bribing the younger aunt, the spinster, with a hundred rubles, and paid her twenty-five in advance. Two days later she came to me and said: "There's an officer, Yefimovich by name, mixed up in this, a lieutenant in your old regiment." I was astonished. This Yefimovich had done me the most harm in my regiment, and about a month ago he had the impudence to come into my pawnshop, not once but twice, pretending he was a client, and I remember him chatting and laughing with my wife. I went up to him at once and told him not to dare come back again in view of what had passed between us; but nothing of *that* sort occurred to me then, I simply thought he was brazen-faced, that's all. And now her aunt informed me that she had already made a rendezvous with him, and that all this business was in the hands of a certain Yulia Samsonovna, an old friend of the aunts, a widow, and a colonel's widow at that. "It's to her your wife keeps running now," I was told.

I shall make this part short. It cost me all of three hundred rubles, but it was arranged that two days later, when my wife was to have her first intimate rendezvous with Yefimovich, I would be standing behind the door into the next room and listening to what they said. In the meantime, the day before the rendezvous, we had a scene which though brief was of extreme significance to me.

She came home in the evening, sat down on the bed and, tapping the rug with her foot, turned a mocking

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

stare at me. Suddenly, as I looked at her, it struck me that all that last month, or rather all that last fortnight, she had not been herself at all; I should even say the exact opposite of herself: a violent creature, aggressive, I should not exactly say shameless, yet an unbalanced creature eager for turmoil. A creature asking for turmoil. Her meekness, however, stood in the way. When one of her kind goes wild you can see, even though she has overstepped all limits, that she is merely forcing herself to it, urging herself on, and that she herself is fighting a losing battle against her chastity and shame. That is why the meek are sometimes liable to overstep the limits, so much so that one's intelligence denies belief of what one has witnessed. A woman with whom depravity is a habit will, on the contrary, invariably tone down the outburst, making it fouler but maintaining a guise of decency which aspires to unchallenged supremacy over you.

"Is it true that you were kicked out of your regiment because you were too much of a coward to fight a duel?" she suddenly asked me, her eyes flashing.

"It is. The officers' court requested me to leave the regiment, but actually I had already sent in my papers before that."

"They kicked you out for a coward!"

"Yes, their verdict said I was a coward. But I had refused to fight that duel not because I was a coward but because I had not wanted to obey their despotic verdict and challenge someone to a duel when I did not consider myself insulted. I assure you," I couldn't hold back the words, "that defying such tyranny, and accepting all the ensuing consequences, took much more courage than fighting any duel in the world."

I couldn't hold back the words and they sounded as if I were trying to justify myself. This new humiliation of mine was just what she wanted. She laughed with malice.

"And is it true that you tramped the streets of St. Petersburg for three years after that, begging for alms and sleeping under billiard tables at night?"

"I've taken shelter both in Sennaya Square and in the Vyazemsky Home. Yes, it's true: after the regiment I suffered much disgrace and degradation, but never moral

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

degradation, because I myself was the first to deplore my actions even then. It was merely a degradation of my will and mind, for which my desperate position alone was responsible. But it's over. . . ."

"Oh yes, you're a personage now—a financier!"

That was an allusion to the pawnshop. But I was quick to take myself in hand. I could see that she was longing for more explanations, humiliating to me, and so I did not give her the pleasure. A client came in most opportunely just then, and I left her to attend to him. It must have been an hour later that she suddenly appeared dressed for the street and, coming up to me, said:

"And yet you told me nothing of this before the wedding, did you?"

I made no reply, and she walked out.

And so, on the following day, there I was standing behind the door into the next room, listening to my fate being decided. There was a revolver in my pocket. She was sitting at the table, dressed up for the rendezvous and Yefimovich was posing and mincing in front of her. What happened then? Why, it all happened precisely the way I had imagined and supposed it would happen (and I am proud to admit it), although I was not aware at the time that I was imagining or supposing it. I don't know whether I'm making myself clear.

This is what happened. I stood listening for a whole hour; for a whole hour I was present at a duel between the noblest and purest of women and a society cad, lecherous and obtuse, with the soul of a reptile. Where, I thought in amazement, where had that naïve, meek and retiring creature learned all that? The wittiest of authors could not have conceived for his comedy of manners this scene of taunting remarks, the most naïve of laughter, and virtue's holy contempt for vice. And what brilliance of speech and repartee, what quickness of wit, what truth in her condemnation of him! And at the same time what a world of really girlish artlessness! She laughed in his face at his protestations of love, his gestures and his proposals. He had come unprepared for any resistance to his crude attack and now he seemed to become deflated. I may

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

CC-0. Mumukshu Bhawan Varanasi Collection. Digitized by eGangotri Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

have thought at first that it was sheer coquetry on her part: "coquetry of a depraved but sharp-witted creature, to set a higher value on herself". But no, the truth stood out, radiant like the sun, and there was no room left for doubt. Only her assumed and rash hatred for me could have driven her, inexperienced as she was, to arrange this rendezvous, but when it came to the point the veil had instantly dropped from her eyes. She was simply casting about for a way to insult me with whatever means she had, but the sordidness of what she had set out to do had repelled her. And could one as immaculate and innocent, one who cherished an ideal, be attracted to Yefimovich or any other society rotter? He only made her laugh at him. All that was sterling in her soul was roused, and indignation called forth sarcasm from her heart. I repeat that towards the end the buffoon was completely dazed and sat there scowling and hardly able to make reply; I was even afraid that he might dare insult her out of a low desire for vengeance. I repeat once more: I'm proud to say that I heard out this scene practically unamazed. It was like encountering something I already knew. It was as if I had expressly gone there to encounter it. I went there believing nothing, none of the accusations, although I did put a revolver in my pocket, but it is the truth. Could I have thought of her differently? Why did I love her then, why did I hold her so dear, why had I married her then? Oh yes, of course, that scene more than convinced me of her hatred for me, but it equally convinced me of her purity. I put an abrupt end to the scene by opening the door. Yefimovich jumped to his feet, I took her by the hand and invited her to come with me. Yefimovich collected his wits together and suddenly gave a peal of ringing laughter.

"Oh, I would not encroach upon the holy ties of matrimony! Take her away, take her away! And do you know," he shouted after me, "even though a decent man should not fight a duel with you, with all due respect for your lady I'm at your service.... That is, of course, if you would risk it...."

"Did you hear that?" I held her back for a moment in the door.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

 Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

After that I uttered not another sound all the way home. I led her by the hand, and she made no resistance. Rather the contrary; she was terribly impressed, but only until we reached home. Once there, she sat down on a chair and stared at me fixedly. She was exceedingly pale; though her lips instantly curved in a sneer, her look was now solemn and rigidly defiant. I think she sincerely believed during those first few moments that I was going to shoot her with my revolver. But I drew it out of my pocket without a word and placed it on the table. She stared both at me and the revolver. (Note this: she was already familiar with the revolver. I had bought and loaded it the day I opened my pawnshop. I had decided against keeping great watchdogs or a powerful footman, the way Moser does for instance. My cook admits the clients. I keep a loaded revolver handy because in our trade one simply must have something to defend oneself with, just in case. When she first came into my house she was very curious about the revolver: I explained to her the way it worked and, moreover, once persuaded her to shoot at a target. Note all this.) Ignoring her frightened look, I lay down on the bed, half-undressed. I felt quite spent; it was already close on eleven. She sat on without moving for about an hour, then blew out the candle and without undressing lay down too, on the sofa, close to the wall. It was the first time that she did not come to bed with me —note that as well. . . .

VI

A HORRIBLE MEMORY

And now that horrible memory. . . .

When I woke up in the morning it must have been some time after seven for the room was almost light. I was wide awake at once, with all my senses alert. I opened my eyes. She was standing in front of the table, holding the revolver. She did not know that I was awake and watching her. And suddenly I saw her coming towards me, revolver in hand, I quickly closed my eyes pretending I was fast asleep.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

She came to the bed and stood over me. I heard everything: dead silence reigned in the room, but I heard the silence. One nervous twitch, and I was compelled to open my eyes against my will. She was looking straight down at me, straight into my eyes, and the revolver was already close to my temple. Our glances met. But the look we exchanged lasted less than a second. I forced myself to close my eyes again, resolving on the instant with all the strength my soul possessed not to stir again or open my eyes no matter what awaited me.

It does happen sometimes that a man, though fast asleep, opens his eyes suddenly, even raises his head for a second and looks about the room, then lays it on the pillow again, without waking up, and sleeps on without remembering anything. Since I had suddenly closed my eyes again and remained as motionless as one fast asleep after meeting her glance and seeing the revolver at my temple, she could certainly assume that I was indeed asleep and had seen nothing; besides, it was more than incredible that I should have closed my eyes again at a moment *like that*, having seen what I had seen.

Yes, it was incredible. Still, she may have guessed the truth—this flashed through my mind in the same fleeting instant. Oh, the whirl of thoughts and feelings that flashed across my mind in less t .n a fleeting instant, and praise be to the electricity of human thought! In that case (I felt) if she has guessed the truth and knows that I am not asleep, she will be crushed by my readiness to meet death and now, perhaps, her hand will falter. Her earlier resolve will be shattered, perhaps, by this new, astonishing revelation. They say that looking down from a great height one is drawn irresistibly into the abyss at one's feet. I believe that many suicides and murders are actually committed simply because a revolver has already been picked up. It is just another abyss, a 45-degree slope which one cannot help sliding down, and an indomitable something compels one to pull the trigger. However, awareness that I had seen everything, knew everything, and was silently awaiting death at her hand, would perhaps save her from slipping down the slope.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

The silence continued, and suddenly I felt the cold touch of steel on my temple, close to my hair. Was I definitely hopeful that I would escape, you will ask. I shall answer you as in the presence of God: I did not entertain a shred of hope—my chances were one in a hundred perhaps. Why was I accepting death then? And now it's my turn to ask you: what use was life to me when a revolver had been pointed at me by the one I adored? Besides, I knew with all the power of my being that the moment meant a fight for supremacy between us, a terrifying life and death duel, a duel fought by that same coward of yesterday who had been thrown out by his comrades for cowardice. I knew it and so did she, that is to say, if she was aware that I was not asleep.

Perhaps there was none of this or perhaps I did not even have those thoughts at the time, but still it all must have been so, be it subconsciously, for I did nothing but think of it afterwards every hour of my life.

You will ask me again: why did I not save her from committing a crime? Oh, I asked myself that very question thousands of times afterwards, every time I recalled that moment with an icy shiver running down my spine. But then my soul was steeped in gloomy despair: I was perishing, so how could I save anyone? How do you know whether I wanted to save anyone at the time or not? Who knows what I may have been feeling then?

My senses were astir, however: seconds passed, there was dead silence; still she stood over me, and suddenly I trembled with hope. I quickly opened my eyes. She was no longer in the room, I got up from the bed; I had won and she was vanquished for ever!

I came out for breakfast. We always had our breakfast served in the front room, and she always poured out the tea herself. I sat down in silence and took the glass she handed me. I looked at her after five minutes or so. She was dreadfully pale, even paler than the night before, and she was looking at me. And suddenly, when she saw that I was looking at her, her pale lips quivered in a pale smile, and her eyes asked a timid question. I thought: "So she is still in doubt and wondering: does he know? Did he see?" I looked away indifferently. After breakfast, I locked

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

the shop and went to the market-place where I bought an iron bedstead and a screen. On return I had the bed placed in the front room and screened off. The bed was to be hers, but I did not say a word to her. Words were superfluous, for the bed told her that *I had seen everything and knew all*, and that there was no longer any doubt. When I went to bed, I left the revolver on the table as usual. That night she silently lay down in her new bed: our marriage was dissolved, she was "vanquished but not pardoned". She was delirious during the night, and acute fever set in towards morning. She was ill for six weeks.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

PART TWO

I

PRIDE'S DREAM

Lukerya has just told me that she will not stay with me and will leave as soon as the mistress is buried. I have been praying on my kness for five minutes, whereas I wanted to pray for an hour, but thoughts are thronging my mind, all of them sick thoughts, and my mind is sick—so what's the use of praying . . . it's sinful, that's all. It is also strange that I do not feel sleepy; when a disaster, a great disaster befalls one, one always wants to go to sleep after the first, most violent paroxysms of grief are over. Men sentenced to death are said to sleep most soundly on their last night. But that's only right; it's nature, otherwise one could not endure it. I lay down on the sofa but I did not fall asleep. . . .

. . .During the six weeks she was ill we nursed her day and night. Lukerya and I, and a trained hospital nurse I had hired. I spared no expense, and I even enjoyed spending money on her. I called in Dr. Schroeder and paid him ten rubles a visit. When she recovered consciousness I tried to keep out of her sight. However, why describe it? When she was up and about again, she came into my room and mutely and silently sat down at a table apart, which I had also bought for her at the time. Yes, it's true, we said nothing to one another; that is, we did begin to talk later on, but it was trivial talk. My taciturnity was intentional, of course, but I very well saw that she, too, was glad she did not have to say too much. I thought it quite natural of her. "She is utterly overwhelmed and vanquished," I thought, "so naturally she must be given a chance to forget and adjust herself." And so we lived in silence, but I spent every minute of mine in preparing myself for the future. I thought she was doing the

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

same, and I enjoyed myself tremendously trying to guess just what she was thinking about then.

Another thing: no one knows of course the anguish I went through, bemoaning her as she lay ill. But I bemoaned her in silence and stifled the moans in my breast so that even Lukerya should not hear. I would not think of it, I could not even imagine her dying without learning everything. And yet, when her life was no longer in danger and she began to recover, I very quickly and effectually regained my peace of mind, I remember that well. More than that, I decided to *postpone our future* for as long as possible, and meantime carry on with the present state of affairs. Yes, a very strange and peculiar thing happened to me then, I do not know what else to call it: I had triumphed over her, and awareness of it alone seemed to satisfy me completely. And that is how we spent the whole winter. Oh yes, I was satisfied, more satisfied than I had ever been, and it went on all winter.

You see, there was one horrible circumstance in my life which had until then, that is until the day of the catastrophe with my wife, been weighing down on me, every day, every hour, and that was—the loss of my good name and my discharge from the regiment. To put it briefly, I had been the victim of despotic unfairness. It is true that my comrades had disliked me because I was difficult to get on with or perhaps because I seemed funny, but then you know how it is sometimes: a thing you hold dear, cherish and revere, unaccountably evokes laughter from a crowd of your comrades. Oh, no one ever liked me, not even at school. I was disliked everywhere and always. Even Lukerya does not like me. And though dislike for me lay at the root of what had happened in the regiment, the upshot was undoubtedly a matter of accident. I am mentioning this because nothing could be more aggravating and intolerable than being ruined through mere blind chance, through an unfortunate sum of circumstances which might well have dispersed like clouds. It is humiliating for a creature of intelligence. This is what happened.

One night, at the theatre, I had gone into the buffet during the interval between acts. A certain hussar, A. by

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

name, walked in and in a very loud voice began to tell two other hussar friends of his, for all the other officers and civilians present to hear, that Captain Bezumtsev of our regiment had been making trouble in the corridor and was "apparently drunk". The others did not pick up the conversation, and then it was not true anyway, because Captain Bezumtsev was not drunk and the trouble was not any trouble at all. The hussars began to talk of something else and so the matter ended, but by the next morning the story had filtered into our regiment and all our officers immediately began to say that I, the only man of our regiment present when A. spoke so insolently of Captain Bezumtsev, ought to have gone up to him and silenced him with a reprimand. But for what earthly reason? If he bore Bezumtsev a grudge, it was their own private affair, and why should I meddle? It now appeared to the officers that it was not a private affair but one that concerned the whole regiment, and since I had been its only representative there the other officers and civilians present could have taken my attitude as proof of our regiment tolerating officers who were not over-scrupulous about their own honour or their regiment's. I could not agree with their reasoning. I was told that I could still set matters right even at this late date by formally challenging A. I refused to do so, and being annoyed, I refused haughtily. After that I sent in my papers at once, and that was the long and the short of the story. I had retained my pride but I was crushed in spirit. I lost my will and my power of reasoning. It so happened just then that my sister's husband in Moscow had finished squandering the little capital we had, including my own share, a tiny share, it's true, but it left me penniless and homeless. I could have taken on a post, but I did not: I could not see myself donning a railwayman's coat after the splendour of my uniform. And so—if it had to be shame, let it be shame; if it had to be disgrace, let it be disgrace; if it had to be degradation, let it, the lower the better—such was my choice. My recollections of the next three years are gloomy, they even include the Vyazemsky Home for the destitute. A year and a half ago my godmother, a rich old woman, died in Moscow and quite unexpectedly remem-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

bered me in her will among others, bequeathing me three thousand rubles. I thought matters over and decided my fate there and then. I decided on the pawnshop because that way I would not ever have to make excuses for my past. Money, a home, and a new life away from my old memories—such was my plan. Nevertheless, my gloomy past and the irretrievable loss of my honour and good name tormented me every hour, every minute. And then I married. Was it chance or not, I do not know. However, when I brought her into my home I thought I was bringing in a friend, for I wanted a friend very badly. I clearly saw, however, that the friend had to be prepared, shaped and even vanquished first. And could I have explained anything to that prejudiced sixteen-year-old child without preliminaries? For instance, if it had not been for the horrible catastrophe with the revolver and the help it so opportunely rendered, could I have proved to her that I was no coward and that my regiment had unfairly accused me of cowardice? The catastrophe had been most timely. My self-control at the point of the revolver was my revenge for all my gloomy past. And though no one else would ever know about it, *she* did, and that meant everything to me, for she herself meant everything to me, all the hope my future held for me in my dreams! She was the only person I was preparing for myself, there was no one else I wanted at all—and now she knew everything: at least she knew that she had been unfairly hasty in joining the ranks of my enemies. This thought delighted me. She could no longer think me a cad, just strange perhaps, but even this thought did not really displease me after what had occurred: queerness is not a vice, rather the reverse, for it sometimes appeals to women. In short, I put off the denouement purposely: what had taken place was more than enough for my peace of mind for the moment, and provided a wealth of visions and material to weave into my dreams. The trouble with me is that I am a dreamer: I had a sufficiency of material, and as for her I thought she could *wait*.

So the winter passed, in expectation of something. I enjoyed stealing glances at her as she sat at her table. She did needlework in the daytime, and in the evenings she

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

sometimes read, taking the books out of my bookcase. My choice of books should have spoken well for me too. She hardly ever went out. I used to take her for a walk every day after dinner before it grew dark, and we would take a stroll but not as silently, however, as before. I tried to make it appear that we were talking pleasantly and were not silent, but, as I have already said before, neither of us wanted to be too expansive. It was intentional on my part, but as for her I thought she had to be "given time". It's curious, of course, that it had never once occurred to me until the very end of the winter that while I enjoyed stealing looks at her I had never, in all this time, caught her looking at me. I thought it was timidity. Besides, she looked so timidly meek, so weak after her illness. No, I thought, I'd better bide my time, and suddenly "one day she'll come to me herself".

This thought had an irresistible fascination for me. I will add that occasionally I could not help working myself up and actually bringing my spirit and mind to a point where I seemed to feel wronged by her. This would last for some time on every occasion. But never was hatred able to ripen and take root in my heart. I myself felt that it was really nothing but a game. And never, never could I think of her as a criminal, not even when I broke our marriage by buying her the bed and screen. And it was not because I judged her crime with flippancy; no, it was because I had the intention of forgiving her completely from the very first, even before buying the bed. In short, it was not like me because I am a stern judge of morals. She seemed to me so vanquished, so humbled and crushed that I pitied her poignantly at times, albeit I positively liked the thought of her humiliation. I liked the idea of this inequality of ours.

I happened to do several good deeds that winter. I took the opportunity to cancel two debts and give one poor woman a loan without taking anything in pawn. I told my wife nothing about it, and the thought that she'd find out was not at the back of my mind when I did it. But the woman came in to thank me, she all but knelt before me. And so she found out; I fancied she was really pleased to learn about the woman.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Spring was approaching, it was already the middle of April, the winter frames were taken out of the windows and the sun lit up our silent rooms in bright clusters of rays. But the veil hung over my eyes and blinded my reason. That fatal, terrible veil! I do not know how it came about, but the veil dropped suddenly, and all at once I saw and understood everything. Was it chance, was it the ultimate day, or had a sunbeam fired my dulled brain to thought and understanding? No, it was neither thought nor understanding, it was a certain nerve which had all but died away, suddenly stirring and twitching back to life, lighting up the whole of my dulled soul and my devilish pride. It was like a jolt. And it did happen suddenly and unexpectedly. It happened before sunset, at about five in the afternoon. . . .

II

THE VEIL DROPPED SUDDENLY

A word or two before I go on. I noticed a strange pensiveness in her one day a month before; it was not just silence, but pensiveness now. That, also, I noticed suddenly. She had been sitting with her head bent low over her sewing, and she did not know that I was watching her. And then, all at once, it struck me that she had grown so thin and frail, her face was so pale and her lips so bloodless—all this, together with her pensiveness, gave me a frightful shock. I had heard her dry little cough before, at night mostly. I got up at once and without telling her anything went out to call Dr. Schroeder.

The doctor came the next day. She was very much surprised and kept glancing from Dr. Schroeder to me and back again.

"But I'm quite well," she said with a vague little smile.

Schroeder did not give her a very thorough examination (these medical men are sometimes conceitedly careless), all he said to me in the other room was that it was the aftereffect of her illness, and that when spring came it would not be a bad idea to go down to the sea or, if that could not be done, to simply move into the country. .

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

In short, he told me nothing except that it was weakness or something like that. When the doctor left, she gave me a frightfully serious look and said:

"I'm quite, quite well."

Saying this she suddenly blushed, apparently with shame. It must have been shame. Oh, I understand it all now: it shamed her that I, who was still *her husband*, was worrying about her as if I were still her real husband. But I failed to understand it then and put her blush down to humility. (The veil!)

And then, a month after that, in April, at about five in the afternoon of a bright, sunny day, I was sitting at my desk, doing my accounts. She was sewing at her own table in our room, and all of a sudden I heard her ... singing, very, very softly. The novelty of it had a staggering effect on me, which I cannot explain to this day. Until then I had hardly ever heard her sing, except perhaps in the very beginning, when I first brought her into my home and we could still amuse ourselves by practising target shots. She had a rather strong and ringing voice then, and though not very true it had a very pleasant and healthy sound. Her singing was so pathetic now—oh, it wasn't a sad song (it was some romance or other), but there was something sickly and broken in her voice, as if it could not cope with the song, as if the song itself was sick. She sang in an undertone, and on a high note her voice broke off—such a poor little voice and it broke off so pathetically; she cleared her throat and took the song up again, very, very softly.

People may laugh at my agitation, but no one will ever understand why I was so agitated. No, I felt no pity for her yet; it was something entirely different. At first, at the very first at least, I was puzzled and terribly surprised, terribly and strangely, the feeling was unwholesome and almost vengeful. "What, singing! And in my presence! *Can she have forgotten about me?*"

I remained where I was, quite overwhelmed, then I got up, took my hat and walked out, without knowing what I was about. That is, I did not know where I was going and why. In the hall, Lukerya helped me into my overcoat.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

"Does she sing?" I found myself asking Lukerya. She did not understand, and stared at me without understanding me; however, I was really difficult to understand then.

"Is this the first time that she is singing?"

"No, she sings sometimes when you are out," Lukerya replied.

I remember everything. I walked downstairs and went out of the house and started aimlessly down the street. I came to the corner and stood there, staring into space. People walked past me and jostled me, but I was insensitive to it. I called a cab and told the man to take me to Police Bridge, I don't know why. All at once I changed my mind and gave him a twenty-kopek tip.

"That's for your trouble," I said, smiling at him stupidly, a strange rapture surging in my heart.

I turned homeward, hurrying my step. That poor little broken note suddenly rang in my soul again. It took my breath away. The veil was dropping; it was dropping, dropping. Her breaking into song in my presence meant that she had forgotten about me—that's what was so clear and frightening. My heart knew it. But my soul was filled with rapture, and it was stronger than fear.

Oh, the irony of fate! Why, I must have carried this rapture in my soul all winter; there could have been nothing else in it, but then where had I myself been all winter? Had I been at one with my soul? I ran up the stairs in my impatience, but I can't tell whether I went in timidly or not. All I remember is that the floor seemed to sway, as if I were floating down a river. I walked into the room, she was sitting, sewing, with her head bent as before, but she no longer sang. She gave me a fleeting, incurious glance, but it wasn't a glance, it was just a reflex, natural and meaningless, when someone comes into the room.

I came straight up to her and sat close beside her, I was like one crazed. She looked at me quickly with something like panic; I took her hand, I don't remember what I said to her, or rather what I had meant to say, because I could not even speak properly then. I could not master my breaking voice. But then I did not know what to say, I just gasped.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

"Let's talk . . . d'you know . . . say something," I mumbled something as inane as this, but oh, could I be sensible then? She trembled again and recoiled from me, terrified, staring into my face, and suddenly the expression in her eyes changed to *stern amazement*. Yes, it was amazement and it was *stern*. She looked at me wide-eyed. Her stern expression, her stern amazement dealt me a crushing blow. "So you want love as well, do you? Love?" this amazement of hers seemed to ask, although she said not a word. But I read it all in her face, all. My whole being was shaken, and I fell at her feet. Yes, I fell at her feet. She jumped up quickly, but I gripped both her hands with all my strength, and held her there.

Oh, I was aware of my desperation, so well aware! But would you believe it, the surge of rapture in my heart was so overpowering, that I thought I would die. I kissed her feet in rapture and happiness. Yes, in happiness, which knew no bounds or measure, and this in spite of my awareness of how little hope there was for me in my despair. I wept and I tried to say something, but words failed me. Suddenly her fright and amazement gave way to an expression of anxiety, a dire question, and she now looked at me queerly, wildly even, there was something she was impatient to understand, and she smiled. She was terribly ashamed that I was kissing her feet and she pulled them away, but I quickly kissed the floor where her feet had stood. She saw it and suddenly began to laugh because she was ashamed (you know how one laughs when one is ashamed). She was becoming hysterical, I saw; her hands were twitching—but I did not give it a thought and went on muttering to her that I loved her, that I would not get up from my knees. "Let me kiss the hem of your gown . . . let me worship you like this all my life. . . ." I don't know, I don't remember—she suddenly burst into sobs and began to shake; she had a dreadful fit of hysterics. I had frightened her.

I carried her to her bed. When the fit passed, she sat up, looking terribly stricken, and, clutching my hands, begged me to calm down. "Come, don't torment yourself so, come!" and began to cry again. I did not leave her side all that evening, telling her I would take her to Bou-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

logne, to the seaside, I would take her there now, at once, in a fortnight; I told her she had such a broken little voice, I had heard it that day; I would close my pawnshop, I'd sell it to Dobronravov, everything would begin anew, but the main thing was Boulogne, Boulogne. She listened and was still frightened. She grew more and more frightened. But what mattered to me mostly was not this, but that I wanted more and more irresistibly to fall at her feet again, and go on kissing the floor her feet had touched, and worship her. "I shall ask nothing, nothing more of you," I kept repeating, "do not answer me, ignore me completely, just let me look at you from afar, make me your thing, your dog. . . ." She wept.

"*And I thought you'd leave me like that,*" the words escaped her so involuntarily that perhaps she was not even aware of having said them, and yet they were the most momentous and fatal words, the meaning of which was more inexorably clear to me than anything else that evening and which was like a knife thrust at my heart. It explained everything to me, everything, but while she was there beside me, while I could look at her, hope carried me away irresistibly and I was terribly happy. Oh, I tired her out completely that evening, I knew it, but the thought that was with me all the time was that I'd make everything different at once. Finally, towards nightfall, she seemed quite spent and I begged her to try to fall asleep, which she did, immediately and soundly. I was afraid she would be delirious; she was, but very slightly. I kept coming up to her almost every minute, I tiptoed to her in my slippers and looked at her. I wrung my hands in anguish looking down on that poor, sick creature in her wretched cot, that three-ruble iron bed I had bought for her. I knelt beside her, but I dared not kiss her feet while she slept (not against her will!). I knelt before the icons to pray, but jumped up again. Lukerya kept an eye on me, coming in from the kitchen every now and again. I went out to her and told her to go to bed, that beginning tomorrow everything would be *quite different.*

And I did believe it, blindly, madly, and terribly. Oh, the elation that flooded my being! All I wanted was for tomorrow to come. I refused to admit misfortune, despite

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

the symptoms. Although the veil had dropped, reason had not returned entirely to me then, and it did not for a very, very long time, not until today, it only returned today. But then how could it have returned earlier? She was alive, she was there before me and I was beside her. "When she awakes I'll tell her all this, and she'll see everything." Such was my reasoning then, simple and clear, and therefore I was elated. The trip to Boulogne was uppermost in my mind. For some reason I imagined that Boulogne meant everything, that Boulogne held the key to something conclusive. "To Boulogne, to Boulogne!" I was madly impatient for morning to come.

III

I UNDERSTAND TOO WELL

To think that it was only a few days ago, five days, only five days ago—last Tuesday! No, no, if only I had a little more time, if only she had waited a bit, I would have dispelled the gloom, and she had calmed down, yes, she had! The very next day she listened to what I said with already a smile on her lips, in spite of her perplexity.... Her perplexity, or was it shamefacedness, was the main thing about her then, all those five days through. She was also afraid, very much afraid. I am not denying it, I shall make no crazy contradictions: she was afraid, but then how could she help being afraid? We had become strangers to one another such a long time ago, had become so unused to one another, and now suddenly all this.... However, I ignored her fear, for I was dazzled by the vision of our new life!... It is true, it is the indisputable truth, that I made a mistake. There may have been more than one mistake. As early as the following day (it was Wednesday), the moment she woke up I immediately made a mistake: I suddenly made her my friend. I was hasty, much too hasty, but I had the need to confess, it was essential that I should—and it was much more than a confession. I concealed nothing, not even things I had concealed from myself all my life. I told her frankly that all that winter I had been confident of her love and had

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

entertained no other thought. I made it clear to her that the pawnshop had been nothing more than my loss of will-power and reason, my own personal idea of self-flagellation and self-glorification. I told her that I had really been a coward in the buffet that day because of my over-sensitiveness: the situation made me shrink, the thought made me shrink that supposing I suddenly stepped forward would it not appear foolish? It was not the duel that frightened me, but the thought of appearing foolish. It had been too late to admit it afterwards, and so I made everyone suffer, I made her suffer for it too, and that was why I married her to make her suffer for it. Altogether I spoke as in a fever most of the time. She took my hands in hers of her own accord and begged me to stop. "You are exaggerating ... you are tormenting yourself", and then she began to cry again, and again it ended in something like a fit. She kept imploring me to tell her nothing of this, and not to recall things.

I took little or no heed of her pleas: the spring, Boulogne! Our sun, our new sun was there! I could talk of nothing else. I closed my pawnshop, and handed over the business to Dobronravov. Then I suddenly asked her if she would not like us to give away all we had to the poor, all except the original capital of three thounsand left me by my godmother which we could spend on our trip to Boulogne, and on return to begin life anew, working for our living. That's what we decided upon, because she said nothing ... but merely smiled. And it must have been her tact prompting that smile more than anything else, so that I should not feel hurt. I did see that I was irksome to her, please don't think that I was too stupid or too selfish not to see it. I saw everything, everything to the least trifle, I saw and understood it all perfectly; my despair was utter and unconcealed.

I talked about myself and about her. About Lukerya too. I told her that I had wept.... I used to change the conversation too, trying to keep her from recalling certain things. And she did brighten up once or twice; I remember it, I do! Why do you say that I looked and saw nothing? If only *this* had not happened, everything would have been resurrected. Because she did tell me—it was

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

only the day before yesterday when our conversation touched upon literature and the books she had read that winter—she did speak of that scene of Gil Blas with the archbishop of Granada, laughing at the recollection. And her laughter had been so sweet and innocent, exactly like before when she was my fiancée (oh, fleeting moment!); and I was so glad! However, her telling me about the archbishop struck me forcibly: it meant that she had been untroubled and happy enough in her loneliness that winter to enjoy a masterpiece. It meant that she had been already becoming quite easy in her mind, that she had been coming to believe that I would leave her *like that.* "I thought you'd leave me *like that,*" was what she said to me that Tuesday. Oh, it was a thought worthy of a ten-year-old girl! And she did believe in it, she did believe that everything would really be *like that*: she at her table, I at mine, and the two of us going on like that till the age of sixty. And all of a sudden, there I was, coming to her, a husband, and a husband who wanted love! What a misunderstanding, what blindness on my part!

Another mistake of mine was that I gazed at her enraptured. I should have held my emotion in check, for rapture frightened her. But you know, I did hold my emotion in check, I did not kiss her feet any more. I never once hinted that I was ... well, that I was a husband. Oh, nothing could have been further from my thoughts, all I did was to worship. But I could not remain completely mute, I could not help saying something! I suddenly went and told her that I enjoyed her conversation tremendously and considered her incomparably better read and educated than myself. She blushed a bright red and shyly told me I was exaggerating. And then, fool that I am, I blurted out to her how much I had admired her when, standing behind the door that day, I had listened to her duel, to her innocence duelling with that brute, how much I had admired her intellect, her brilliant wit, blended with such childlike artlessness. A shudder seemed to run through her, again she murmured that I was exaggerating, but suddenly a shadow crossed her face, she buried her face in her hands and sobbed. Well, it was more than

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

I could stand: I fell on my knees before her again and began to kiss her feet again, and once again it all ended in a fit of hysterics, the way it had last Tuesday. This happened last night, and in the morning. . . .

In the morning? Oh madman, that morning was today, only a short while ago, so short a while!

Listen and try to understand: when we met at breakfast this morning (after last night's fit, mind you) she quite amazed me by her composure, do you see? And I had stayed awake all night, trembling with fear because of what had passed between us the evening before. And there she was suddenly coming straight up to me, stopping in front of me with her hands clasped in entreaty (only a while ago, a while ago!) and saying to me that she was a criminal and knew it, that her crime had tormented her all winter, that it was tormenting her even then . . . that she appreciated my magnanimity too well and that "I shall be a faithful wife to you, I shall respect you". I leapt to my feet and embraced her madly. I kissed her; I kissed her face, her lips, like a husband would kiss his wife after a long separation. And why did I ever go out then. I was only away for two hours . . . to visa our passports. . . . Oh God! If I had only come back five minutes earlier, only five minutes. . . . That crowd at our gate, the stares they gave me. . . . Oh God!

Lukerya says (oh, I shall never let Lukerya go now, she knows everything, for she was with us all winter, she'll be telling me all about it), Lukerya says that after I had gone out and only some twenty minutes before my return, she went into our room to ask her mistress something, I don't remember what, and saw that her icon (that icon of the Holy Virgin) had been taken down from the wall and was standing in front of her on the table, as if the mistress had just been praying. "Mistress, dear!" Lukerya had cried. "It's nothing, Lukerya, go. Oh wait, Lukerya," she had said, and coming up to Lukerya had kissed her. "Are you happy, mistress?" Lukerya had asked. "Yes, Lukerya." "Master ought to have come and begged your forgiveness long before this. . . . Thank the Lord, you've made it up now. . . ." And then she had smiled a very strange smile and said: "Good, Lukerya. Go now, Luke-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

rya." So strange had that smile been that ten minutes later Lukerya went back to take another look at her. "There she was standing against the wall, close to the window, her head pressed to her arm that was propped against the wall, standing there and thinking, she was. She was so lost in thought that she never heard me come in and stand in the door watching her. It seemed to me that she was smiling, standing there, thinking and smiling. I took another look at her, turned and tiptoed away, thinking these thoughts the while, when suddenly I heard her opening the window. I hurried back to warn her it was chilly and she might catch cold, when suddenly I saw her getting up on the window-sill, and there she was standing at full height in the open window with her back to me and the icon in her hands. My heart just sank. 'Mistress! Mistress!' I cried. She heard me, made as if to turn to me, but she did not turn. She took a step, clutched the icon to her breast and—jumped out of the window!"

All I remember is that when I walked into the gate the body was still warm. And all of them staring at me. They had all been shouting, but now, suddenly, they fell silent and made way for me—and she, she was there on the ground with the icon. I remember as through a black haze coming up silently and looking down at her for a long time. All the people crowded round me, saying something to me. Lukerya was there, but I did not see her. She says that she spoke to me. I only remember that tradesman: he kept shouting to me that "she had bled a handful through the mouth, a handful, a handful!" and showed me the blood on the cobblestones in front of me. I believe I touched the blood with my finger, there was a smear on my finger and I stared at it (I remember that), while he kept on shouting: "A handful, a handful!"

"What is a handful, what?" I screamed at the top of my voice, they say, raised my arms and rushed at him. . . .

Oh, it's crazy, crazy! It's a misunderstanding! Incredible! Impossible!

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

IV

JUST FIVE MINUTES LATE

Isn't it? Isn't it incredible? Could anyone say that a thing like that was possible? Why did that woman die, what for?

Oh, believe me when I say that I do understand; but why did she have to die? This still remains a question. She was frightened by my love; she had asked herself earnestly should she accept it or not, but the question had been more than she could endure, and she chose death. I know, I know, it's no use racking my brains: she had given too many promises, she was afraid she could not keep them. That's clear. There are certain considerations here too horrible to contemplate.

Why and what for did she die? The question remains. The question is hammering, hammering at my brain. I would have left her *like that* had she wished it, had she wanted everything to be left *like that*. She did not believe I would, that's what it was! No, no, I am lying, it was not that at all. It was simply that with me it had to be in all honesty, to love me in all ways if she loved me at all, and not as she would have loved that shopkeeper. And since she was too chaste and pure to agree to the sort of love demanded by the shopkeeper, she could not bring herself to deceive me. She refused to deceive me with a half-love, or a quarter-love, disguised as true love. She was too honest, that was it. And I was going to implant generosity into her heart once, remember? An absurd thought.

I am most curious to know whether or not she respected me. I don't know whether or not she despised me. I do not think she despised me. Strange, isn't it, that it never once occurred to me in all those winter months that she despised me! I had been quite convinced of the opposite until the moment she looked at me with that *stern amazement*. *Stern* it was, indeed. It was then it suddenly dawned on me that she despised me. I understood it, irrevocably, for ever and ever. Ah, what if she did despise me, despised me for the rest of her life if only she had remained alive! She was moving about and talking only a little while ago.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

How could she jump out of the window? It's beyond my understanding. And could I have suspected it even five minutes ago? I summoned Lukerya. I'll never let Lukerya go now, not for anything in the world.

Oh, we could have come to an understanding yet. We had only become terribly estranged from one another during the winter, but surely we could have grown into the habit again? Why shouldn't we have been able to become friends and start life anew? I am magnanimous and so was she—there's one link for you. Only a few more words, two days, no more, and she would have understood everything.

The pity of it is that it was sheer accident—an ordinary, cruel and senseless accident. That's the pity of it! Five minutes, I was just five minutes late! Had I come back five minutes earlier, that moment would have flashed past like a cloud, never to enter her head again. And it would have all ended in her understanding everything. But now, there are the empty rooms again, and I all alone. There's the pendulum swinging and clicking without the least concern or pity for anything. There's no one—that's the misery of it.

I keep pacing up and down, up and down. I know, I know without your prompting; you think it funny that I'm putting the blame on an accident and being five minutes late. But it is obvious. Consider this: she did not even leave a note to say that she was taking her own life, the way everybody does. Surely it would have occurred to her that suspicion might fall on Lukerya: "You were alone with her, so you went and pushed her," so to say. Though guiltless, they would have certainly dragged her through the courts, if not for those four people down in the yard who said they saw her, either from their windows in the wing or from the yard below, standing up on the window-sill with the icon in her hands and then jumping down. But it was also sheer chance, you know, those people being there and seeing it. No, it was nothing but a moment, an unaccountable moment. Impulse and imagination! What if she has been sitting there and praying? It does not necessarily mean a prayer before death. The whole moment may have lasted no more than ten min-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

utes; she may have formed the resolve within that very minute when she stood against the wall, resting her head on her arm and smiling. The idea had flashed across her mind, sending it into a whirl, and she had not been able to withstand it.

It was a misunderstanding, that's obvious, whatever you say. I was not beyond living with. Could it have been anaemia, I wonder? Perhaps it was just her anaemia, a sapping of vitality? That winter had worn her out, that's what it was. . . .

I came too late!!!

How small and thin she looks in her coffin, how sharp her nose! Her eyelashes are like tiny arrows on her cheeks. And the way she fell—nothing broken, nothing smashed. Only that one "handful of blood". A dessert spoon, that is. Internal haemorrhage. A queer thought: supposing she did not have to be buried? Because if they take her away . . . then . . . oh no, it's almost impossible to let her be taken away. I do realise, of course, that they'll have to take her away, I am neither mad nor raving; on the contrary, my reason has never before been so lucid—but how can it be: no one in the house again; again those two rooms, and I alone in my pawnshop! I'm raving, raving, this is raving indeed! I made her suffer too much, that's the reason.

What do I care for your laws now? What use have I for your customs, your morals, your world, your country, your creed? Let your judge sit in judgement over me, let them take me to court, your public court, and I shall say that I defy everything. The judge will shout: "I order silence, Officer!" And I shall shout back: "What power have you now to make me obey? Why did bigoted ignorance wreck what was dearest to me? What good will your laws do me now? I am withdrawing from you all!" Oh, I don't care!

She's blind, blind! She's dead, she cannot hear. You do not know that I would have built a paradise for you to dwell in. For I had a paradise in my heart, and I would have lavished it on you. Granted you would not have given me your love—never mind, what of it? Everything would have remained *like that*, it would have gone on being

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

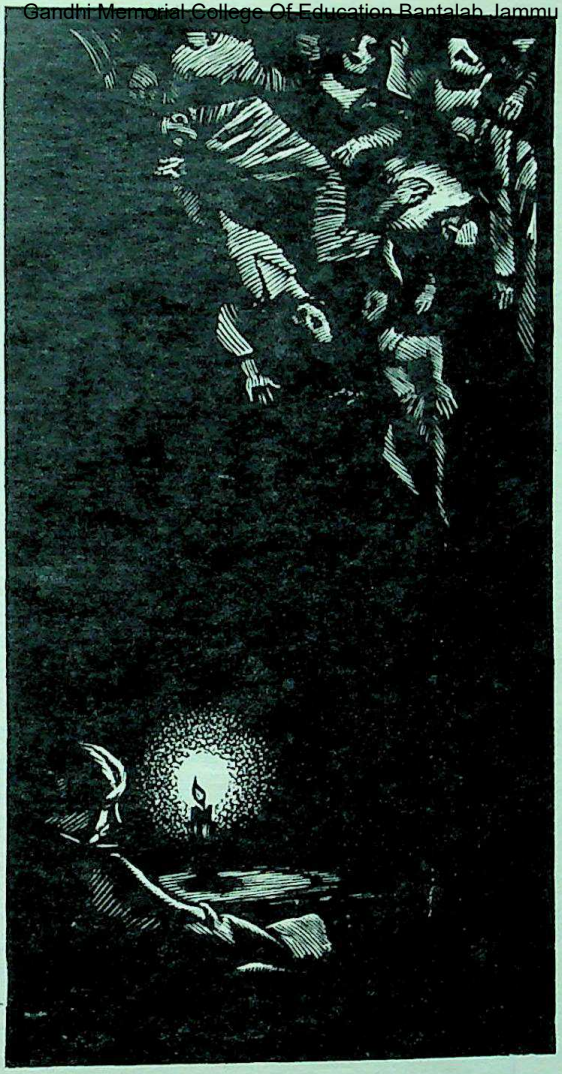
Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

like that. You would have spoken to me as to a friend; we would have delighted in our talks and laughed together, looking happily into each other's eyes, that's all. And that's how it would have been. And even if you came to love another, why—never mind, never mind! You would have walked along with him and smiled, while I would have looked at you from across the street.... Oh, never mind anything, if only she would open her eyes just once! For one single moment, just one! If she would only look at me the way she had done earlier today when she stood before me and swore to be a faithful wife to me! Oh, in that single glance she would have understood everything.

Emptiness! Oh, nature! People are alone on this planet, that's the trouble. "Is there a living soul in this field?" cries the hero of Russian legend. Though no legendary hero, I make the same call, but no one responds. They say the sun gives life to the universe. But the sun rises and —look—isn't it dead? Everything is dead, the dead lie everywhere. Just solitary people, and all about—silence. That's the kind of world we live in. "People, love one another"—who said that? Whose commandment is it? The pendulum is clicking unfeelingly, horridly. It's two in the morning. Her shoes are standing beside her bed, as though waiting for her.... Now, seriously, they'll take her away tomorrow, and whatever shall I do?

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu



THE DREAM
OF A RIDICULOUS MAN

A Fantasy

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

I

I am ridiculous. They call me a madman now. It would be a promotion for me did I not appear as ridiculous to them as ever. But I no longer mind—they are all dear to me now, even when they are laughing at me—indeed, something endears them to me particularly then. I would laugh with them—not at myself, that is, but because I love them—I would laugh if I did not feel so sad watching them. What saddens me is that they do not know the Truth, and I do. Oh, how hard it is to be the only one to know the Truth! But they will not understand this. No, they will not.

It used to hurt me very much that I seemed ridiculous. I did not seem it, I was. I have always been ridiculous and I think I've known it since the day I was born. I believe I realised it when I was seven, I went to school and then to the university, but what of it? The more I studied the more I came to realise that I was ridiculous. And so, as far as I was concerned, the ultimate meaning of science was to prove and explain to me, the more I probed it, that I was indeed ridiculous. Life taught me the same thing. With every year my awareness of how ridiculous I was in every respect grew and developed. I was laughed at by everyone and all the time. But none of them knew or guessed that of all the people in the world I knew best how ridiculous I was, and it was the fact that they did not know this that hurt me most of all, but the fault was entirely mine: I was always so proud that I would never admit this knowledge to anyone. My pride swelled in me with the years, and had I allowed myself to admit to anyone that I was ridiculous, I believe I would have blown my brains out that same night. Oh, the torment

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

I went through in my adolescence for fear that I would weaken and make the admission to my friends! As I grew to manhood I learned more and more of this awful shortcoming of mine with every year, but in spite of this I took it a little more calmly for some reason. I repeat—for some reason, because to this day I fail to give it a clear definition. Perhaps it was because of that hopeless sadness that was mounting in my soul about something that was infinitely greater than myself: this something was a mounting conviction that *nothing mattered.* I had begun to suspect this long ago, but positive conviction came to me all at once, one day last year. I suddenly knew that *I would not have cared* if the world existed at all or if there was nothing anywhere. I began to know and feel with all my being that *there has been nothing* since I have been there. At first I kept thinking that there must have been a great deal before, but then I realised that there had not been anything before either, and that it only seemed so for some reason. Gradually, I became convinced that there would never be anything at all. It was then I suddenly ceased minding people and no longer noticed them at all. It was quite true, even in the merest trifles: for instance, I would walk into people as I went along the street. Not that I was lost in thought either, for what was there to think about, I had given up thinking altogether then: I did not care. Neither did I solve any problems; no, not a single one, and yet there was a host of them. But *I did not care* now, and all the problems receded into the background.

And it was much later that I learned the Truth. It was in November, the 3rd of November to be exact, that I learned the Truth, and since then I remember every moment of my life. It happened on a gloomy night, the gloomiest night that could ever be. I was walking home, the time being after ten, and I remember thinking that no hour could be gloomier. It was so even physically. It had been raining all day, and it was the coldest and gloomiest rain, even an ominous rain, I remember, obviously hostile to people, and suddenly after ten it stopped and a horrible dampness set in, which was colder and damper than during the rain, and steam rose from everyth-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Education Bantalab Jammu

ing, from every cobble-stone, from every alleyway if you peered into its deepest and darkest recesses. I suddenly fancied that if all the gas-lights were to go out it would be more cheerful, for gas-light, showing up all this, made one feel even sadder. I had hardly eaten anything that day, and since late afternoon I had been at an engineer's I knew, with two other friends of his. I said nothing all evening and I believe I bored them. They were discussing something exciting and actually lost their tempers over it. They did not care, I could see, but lost their tempers just like that. I went and blurted it out to them: "Gentlemen," I said, "you don't really care, you know." They took no offence, they just laughed at me. That was because there was no sting in my remark, I simply made it because I did not care. They saw that I did not care and it made them laugh.

When, walking home, I thought of the gas-light, I glanced up at the sky. The sky was terribly dark, but I could clearly make out the ragged clouds and the fathomless black pits between them. Suddenly I noticed a tiny star twinkling in one of those pits and I stopped to stare at it. That was because the tiny star gave me an idea: I would kill myself that night. I had made up my mind to do it fully two months before, and poor though I am I had bought a splendid revolver and had loaded it that same day. Two months had already passed, however, and it was still lying in my desk drawer; my feeling of not caring had been so strong then that I wanted to choose a moment when it would be a little less so to do it in, why—I do not know. And so every night, for two months, I had gone home with the thought of killing myself. I was watching for the right moment. And now this star gave me the idea, and I made up my mind that *it had to be* that night. I do not know why the tiny star gave me the idea.

There I stood staring at the sky when suddenly the little girl clutched at my arm. The street was already deserted and there was hardly a soul about. A droshky was standing some way off with the driver dozing in it. The girl must have been about eight. All she wore in this cold was a poor cotton frock and a kerchief, she was drenched through, but I particularly noticed her sodden, broken

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

shoes. I remember them even now. They struck me particularly. She suddenly began to tug at my elbow and cry. She was not weeping, but was crying out snatches of words which she could not articulate properly because she was shivering all over as if in a fever. Something had frightened her, and she called out desperately: "My mummy, my mummy!" I half-turned towards her but said not a word and continued on my way, while she kept running after me, tugging at my coat, and her voice rang with that peculiar sound which in badly frightened children means despair. I know that sound. Though her words were incoherent, I understood that her mother lay dying somewhere, or perhaps it was some other disaster that had befallen them, and she had rushed out into the street to find someone or something to help her mother. But I did not go with her; on the contrary, it suddenly occurred to me to drive her away. I told her to go and look for a policeman. But she folded her hands in entreaty and, sobbing and panting, ran along at my side and would not leave me alone. It was then I stamped my feet at her and shouted. All she cried was: "Sir, oh sir!" but, abandoning me abruptly, she darted across the street: another passer-by had appeared there and it was to him she must have run from me.

I climbed my five flights of stairs. I live in a lodging house. My room is wretched and small, with just one attic window in it, a semicircular one. The furniture consists of an oilcloth-covered sofa, two chairs, a table with my books on it, and an armchair, a very, very old one but a Voltaire armchair for all that. I sat down, lighted my candle, and gave myself up to thought. The room next door was a real madhouse. It has been going on since the day before yesterday. The man who lives there is a discharged captain and he was having guests, about six of them—castaways on the sea of life—drinking vodka and playing *stoss* with an old deck of cards. There had been a fight the night before, and I know that two of them had torn at one another's hair for quite a long time. The landlady wanted to put in a complaint against them, but she is terribly afraid of the captain. The only other lodger is a thin little lady, an officer's wife, a newcomer to the

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

town with three small children, who have all been ill since they came here. The lady and the children live in deadly fear of the captain, they spend their nights shaking with fear and praying, and as for the youngest baby, it was even frightened into a fit once. The captain, I know for a fact, sometimes accosts people on the Nevsky and begs alms. He won't be given a post anywhere, but strangely (this is why I am telling all this), in all the months he has been staying with us, he never once roused any resentment in me. I naturally shunned his company from the outset, but then he too thought me a bore the very first time we met, and no matter how loudly they shout in their room or how many they are—I never care. I sit up all night and, honestly, I never even hear them, so utterly do I forget them. I cannot sleep, you know; it has been like that for a year now. I spend the night sitting in my armchair and doing nothing. I only read in the daytime. I just sit there, without even thinking. My thoughts are vague and stray, and I let them wander. My candle burns down every night. And so, I calmly settled down in my chair, took out my revolver and placed it on the table before me. I remember asking myself as I put it down, "Are you sure?" and answering very firmly, "I *am* sure." That is, I would kill myself. I knew that I would definitely kill myself that night, but how much longer I would sit thus at the table before I did it I did not know. And I would have certainly killed myself if it had not been for that little girl.

II

You see how it was: though I did not care, I was still sensitive to pain, for instance. If someone struck me I would feel the pain. Mentally it was exactly the same: if something very pathetic happened I would feel pity, just as I would have felt pity in the days before I had ceased caring for anything in the world. And I did feel pity earlier that night: surely, I should have helped a child in distress. Why had I not helped her then? Because of a thought that had occurred to me; when she was tug-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

ging at my coat and crying out, a problem suddenly confronted me and I was unable to solve it. It was an idle problem but it had angered me. I got angry because, having definitely decided to commit suicide that very night, I ought to have cared less than ever for anything in the world. Then why had I suddenly felt that I did care and was sorry for the little girl? I remember I was frightfully sorry for her, my pity was strangely poignant and absurd in my position. I really cannot give a better description of that fleeting feeling of mine, but it remained with me even after I had reached my room and had seated myself in my chair, and it vexed me more than anything else had done for a long time. One argument followed another. It was perfectly clear to me that if I was a man and not yet a nought, and had not yet become a nought, I was therefore alive and, consequently, able to suffer, resent, and feel shame for my actions. Very well. But if I was going to kill myself in a couple of hours from then, why should I be concerned with the girl and what did I care for shame or anything else in the world? I would become a nought, an absolute nought. And could it be that my ability to feel pity for the girl and shame for my vile action was not in the least affected by the certainty that I would soon become *completely* non-existent, and therefore nothing would exist. Why, the reason I had stamped my feet and shouted so brutally at the poor child was to assert that "far from feeling pity, I could even afford to do something inhumanly vile now, because two hours hence all would fade away". Do you believe me when I say that this was the reason why I had shouted? I am almost positive now that it was that. It had seemed clear to me that life and the world were from then on dependent on me, as it were. I should even say that the world seemed specially made for me alone: if I killed myself the world would be no more, at least as far as I was concerned. To say nothing of the possibility that there would really be nothing for anyone after I was gone, and the moment my consciousness dimmed the whole world, being a mere attribute of my consciousness, would instantly dim too, fade like a mirage and be no more, for it may be that all this world of ours and all these people are merely part

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

of myself, are just myself. I remember that as I sat there and reasoned, I gave an entirely different twist to all these new problems that were thronging my mind, and conceived some perfectly new ideas. For instance, a strange notion like this occurred to me: supposing I had once lived on the moon or Mars and had there committed the foulest and scurviest of deeds imaginable, for which I had been made to suffer all the scorn and dishonour conceivable in nothing less than a dream, a nightmare, and supposing I later found myself on the earth, with the crime committed on that other planet alive in my consciousness and, besides, knowing there was no return for me, ever, under any circumstances—would I *have cared* or not as I gazed at the moon from this earth? Would I have felt shame for that deed or not? All these questions were idle and superfluous since the revolver was already lying in front of me and I knew with all my being that *it* was bound to happen, and yet the questions excited me and roused me to a frenzy. I no longer seemed able to die before I had solved something first. In short, that little girl saved my life because the unsolved questions put off the deed. Meanwhile, the noise at the captain's began to subside too: they had finished their game and were now settling down to sleep, grumbling, and sleepily rounding off their mutual abuse. It was then that I suddenly fell asleep in my chair in front of the table, a thing that never happened to me before. I dropped off without knowing it at all. Dreams, we all know, are extremely queer things: one will be appallingly vivid, with the greatest imaginable precision in every minutely finished detail, while another will take you through time and space so swiftly that you hardly notice the flight. Dreams, I believe, are directed by desire, not reason, by the heart and not the mind, and yet what fantastic tricks my reason sometimes plays on me in dreams! The things that happen to my reason in sleep are quite incredible. To give an instance: my brother has been dead these five years. I dream of him sometimes: he takes an active interest in my affairs, we are very fond of one another, yet all through my dream I know perfectly well that my brother has long been dead and buried. Why does it not surprise me then that though

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

dead he is still there beside me, worrying about my affairs? Why does my reason reconcile itself to all this so willingly? But enough. To return to my dream. Yes, my dream of November the 3rd. They all tease me now that, after all, it was nothing but a dream. But surely it makes no difference whether it was a dream or not since it did reveal the Truth to me. Because if you have come to know it once and to see it, you will know it is the Truth and that there is not, there cannot be any other, whether your are dreaming or living. Very well, it was a dream—let it be a dream, but the fact remains that I was going to snuff out the life which you all extol so, whereas my dream, my dream—oh, my dream revealed to me another life, a life revived, magnificent and potent.

Listen then.

III

I said that I fell asleep without knowing it and even continuing with my musings on the same matters when no longer awake, as it were. A dream came to me that I picked up my revolver and pressed it to my heart—my heart and not my head, whereas I had definitely decided to shoot myself through the head, and the right temple it had to be. With the revolver pressed to my heart I waited a moment or two, and suddenly my candle, the table and the wall in front of me all began to rock and sway. I quickly pulled the trigger.

In dreams you sometimes fall from a great height or you are stabbed or beaten, but you never feel the pain unless you jerk and actually hurt yourself against the bedpost; you do feel the pain then, and it is almost certain to wake you up. It was the same in my dream: I felt no pain but with the sound of the report my whole being seemed to be shaken up and suddenly everything was extinguished and there was a horrible blackness all around me. I seemed to have gone blind and mute, I was lying on something very hard, stretched out on my back, seeing nothing and unable to make the slightest movement. Voices shouted

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

and feet stamped all about me; there was the captain's low rumble and the landlady's shrill screech—and suddenly there was a blank again, and now they were carrying me in a coffin with the lid nailed down. I could feel the coffin swaying and I was reflecting upon it, when all of a sudden the thought struck me for the first time: I was dead, quite dead. I knew it without a doubt, I could neither see nor move, and yet I could feel and reason. But soon I reconciled myself to this and, as usual in dreams, accepted the fact without demur.

And now they were piling earth over my grave. Everyone left, I was alone, utterly alone. I did not stir. Whenever I used to imagine what it would be like to be buried, I generally associated but one sensation with the grave: the feeling of damp and cold. And now too I felt very cold, the tips of my toes were the worst, and that was all the sensation I had.

I lay there and, strangely, expected nothing, resigning myself to the fact that the dead have nothing to expect. But it was damp. I do not know how long I lay there—whether it was an hour, or a day, or many days. All of a sudden a drop of water, which had seeped through the lid of the coffin, fell on my left closed eye; a minute later there was another drop, a minute more and there was a third, and so on, drops falling at regular one-minute intervals. Indignation mounted in my heart, and suddenly I felt a physical pain in it. "It's my wound," I thought. "My shot, the bullet's there...." And the water kept dripping, a drop a minute, straight down on my closed eye. I suddenly invoked, not with my voice for I lay inert, but with the whole of my being, the Ruler of all that was befalling me:

"Whoever Thou may be, but if Thou art and if there does exist a wiser order of things than the present, suffer it to be here too. But if Thou art imposing vengeance upon me for my unwise suicide, with ugliness and absurdity of the life to come, then know Thee that no tortures I could ever be made to suffer could compare with the contempt I shall always feel in silence, be it through millions of years of martyrdom!"

I invoked and fell silent. Deep silence reigned for al-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

most a full minute, and one more drop fell, but I knew with infinite and profound faith, that all would be different now. And suddenly my grave was rent open. That is, I do not know if it was dug open, but a dark and strange being picked me up and bore me away into space. I suddenly recovered sight. It was deep night, and never, never had there been such darkness yet! We were flying through space, the earth was already far behind us. I asked the one that bore me nothing at all, I waited, I was proud. I made myself believe I was not afraid, and my breath caught with admiration at the thought that I was not afraid. I do not remember how long we flew nor can I venture a guess: everything was happening the way it usually happens in dreams when you leap over space and time, over all laws of life and reason, and only pause where your heart's desire bids you pause. I remember I suddenly saw a tiny star in the darkness. "Is it Sirius?" I could not hold back the question, although I did not want to ask anything at all. "No, that is the star you saw between the clouds on your way home," replied the one that was bearing me away. I knew the being was somewhat human in likeness. Strangely enough, I had no love for that being, I rather felt a deep aversion for it. I had expected complete non-existence and with that thought I had shot myself. And now I was in the hands of a being, not a human being of course, but a being nonetheless that *was*, that existed. "It just shows that there is life hereafter," I thought with the peculiar flippancy of dreams, but the essence of my spirit remained with me intact. "If I must *be* again," I thought, "and again live by someone's inescapable will, I do not want to be beaten and humiliated!" "You know that I am afraid of you, and for this you despise me," I suddenly said, unable to hold back my cringing words which held an admission, and feeling the pin-prick of humiliation in my heart. There was no reply, but all at once I knew that I was not being despised; I was not being laughed at nor even pitied; I knew that our flight through space had a purpose, mysterious and strange, concerning me alone. Fear mounted in my heart. Something was being mutely but painfully transmitted to me by my silent companion, piercing me

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

through as it were. We flew through dark and unfamiliar space. I no longer saw the constellations my eyes were used to seeing. I knew that there were certain stars in the vastness of the sky whose light rays took thousands and millions of years to reach the earth. Perhaps we were already flying through those regions. I waited for I knew not what, my tormented heart gripped with a terrible anguish. And suddenly I was shaken with a feeling that was familiar and so stirring: I saw our sun! I knew it could not be *our* sun which had begotten *our* earth, and also that we were infinitely far away from our sun, but my whole being told me that this was a sun exactly like our own, a duplicate of it, its twin. My soul rang with sweet and stirring ecstasy: this familiar source of light, the same light that had given me life, evoked an echo in my heart and resurrected it, and for the first time since my burial I sensed life, the same life as before.

"But if this is the sun, if this is a sun exactly like ours, then where is the earth?" I cried. And my companion pointed to a star sparkling in the darkness like emerald. We were flying straight towards it.

"Are such duplications really possible in the universe, is this really the law of nature? And if that star is an earth, can it be an earth like ours ... exactly like ours, wretched and poor but dear and ever beloved, inspiring even in its most ungrateful children a love as poignant as our own earth inspires?" I cried out, trembling with rapturous, boundless love for that dear, old earth I had deserted. A vision of the poor little girl I had hurt flashed past me.

"You shall see everything," my companion said, and I sensed a peculiar sorrow in his words. But now we were quickly nearing the planet. It grew as we approached, I could already distinguish the oceans, the outline of Europe, and suddenly a great and holy jealousy flared up in my heart. "How can such a duplication be and what for? I do love and can love only the earth I have left behind, the earth bespattered with my blood when in my ingratitude I snuffed out my life with a shot through the heart. But I never, never ceased to love that earth, and the night

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

I parted with it I think I loved it even more poignantly than ever before. Does this new earth hold suffering? On our earth we can only love truly by suffering and only through suffering. We can love in no other way and know no other love. I must have suffering, if I would love. I want, I long this instant to kiss that one and only earth I left behind me, and weep, and I do not want, I defy life on any other!"

But my companion had already left me. I do not know how it came about but suddenly I found myself upon this other earth in the bright sunlight of a day as lovely as paradise. I believe I was on one of those islands which on our earth comprise the Greek Archipelago, or it may have been on the mainland somewhere, on the shore which the Archipelago adjoins. Everything was exactly the same as on our earth, but it all seemed to wear the radiance of a holiday, and shone with the glory of a great and holy triumph at last attained. A gentle emerald-green sea softly lapped the shores and caressed them with a love that was undisguised, visible, and almost conscious. Tall and beautiful trees stood in flowering splendour, while their countless little leaves welcomed me (I'm certain of it) with their gentle and soothing rustling, and they seemed to be murmuring words of love to me. The meadow was ablaze with bright, fragrant flowers. Birds fluttered above in flocks and unafraid of me alighted on my shoulders and hands and happily beat me with their sweet, tremulous wings. And finally I saw and came to know the people of this joyous land. They came to me themselves, they surrounded me and kissed me. Children of the sun, of their own sun—oh how beautiful they were! I have never seen such beauty in man on our planet. Only in our youngest children could one, perhaps, detect a distant and very faint reflection of this beauty. The eyes of these happy people shone with a clear light. Their faces were aglow with wisdom and intelligence matured into serenity, but their expression was gay; their words and voices rang with childlike joy. Oh, I instantly understood all, all, the moment I looked into their faces! This was an earth undefiled by sin, inhabited by people who had not sinned; they dwelt in a Garden of Eden just like the one in

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

which our ancestors, so the legends of all mankind say, had once dwelt before they knew sin, with the only difference that the whole of this earth was one great Garden of Eden. These people, laughing happily, clung to me and caressed me; they led me away and every one of them showed eagerness to comfort me. They did not question me about anything at all, they seemed to know all, and were anxious to drive the suffering from my face.

IV

I repeat, you see: let it be nothing but a dream. But the sensation of being loved by those innocent and beautiful people will remain with me for ever, and even now I can feel their love pouring down on me from up there. I have seen them with my own eyes, have known them and been convinced; I have loved them and, afterwards, suffered for them. Oh, I realised from the first that I should never be able to understand them at all in many things; for instance, it appeared inexplicable to me, a modern Russian progressive and wretched citizen of St. Petersburg, that, knowing so much, they did not possess our science. But I soon realised that their knowledge was enriched and stimulated by other penetrations than ours, and that their aspirations were also quite different from ours. They desired nothing and were content, they did not strive to know life the way we strive to probe its depth, because their life was consummate. Their knowledge was finer and more profound than our science, for our science attempts to explain the meaning of life. Science itself strives to fathom it in order to teach others how to live; while *they* knew how to live without the help of science, I saw it but I could not understand this knowledge of theirs. They showed their trees to me, and I failed to appreciate the depth of the love with which they gazed at them: it was as if they were speaking to beings like themselves. And do you know, I may not be wrong if I tell you that they did speak to them. Yes, they had found a common tongue and I am convinced the trees understood them. This was the way they treated all Nature—the beasts who lived in peace with them, never

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation;Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

attacking them and loving them, captivated by the people's love for them. They pointed out the stars to me and spoke to me about them, saying things I could not understand, but I am positive they had some tie with those heavenly bodies, a living tie, not spiritual alone. Oh no, these people did not insist that I should understand them, they loved me anyway, but then I knew that they, too, would never understand me and so hardly spoke to them about our earth. I only kissed the earth they lived on and without words adored them, and they saw it and permitted themselves to be adored, unashamed of my adoration, for their own love was great. They felt no pang for me when, moved to tears, I sometimes kissed their feet, joyfully certain in my heart of the infinite love with which they would reciprocate my emotion. I sometimes asked myself in bewilderment: how was it that they never insulted one like me, never roused one like me to feelings of jealousy or envy? I asked myself again and again, how did I, a braggart and a liar, refrain from telling them of all my acquired knowledge of which they naturally had no inkling, from wishing to impress them with it, if only because I loved them? They were gay and frolicsome like children. They wandered about their beautiful groves and forests, singing their beautiful songs, eating light food—the fruit of their trees, the honey of their woods, and the milk of the beasts devoted to them. They toiled but little to procure their food and clothing. They loved and begot children, but never did I detect any signs of that *cruel* sensuality in them, which almost everyone falls victim to on our earth, one and all, and which serves as the sole source of almost all the sins of mankind on our earth. They welcomed the children born to them as new participants in their bliss. There were no quarrels or jealousy among them, and they did not even understand the meaning of these words. Their children were the children of all of them, for they formed one family. Sickness was very rare, though there was death; but their old people died peacefully; they seemed to fall asleep, blessing and smiling upon the ones they were taking leave of, themselves carrying away the clear smiles of those surrounding them in farewell. I saw no grief or tears then, only love mul-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

tiplied as it were to ecstasy, but an ecstasy that was serene, contemplative and consummate. It was as if they kept in touch with their dead even after their death, and that their earthly ties were unsevered by death. They hardly understood me when I asked them if they believed in life eternal, for evidently their faith in it was so implicit it presented no problem to them. They had no churches, but they had a vital, close and constant association with the Sum of the universe; they had no creed, but instead they had the unshakable knowledge that, when their earthly bliss was consummated to the ultimate extent of its earthly nature, all of them—the living and the dead—would come into even closer contact with the Sum of the universe. They looked forward to that day with eagerness but with no impatience or morbid longing. It seemed rather that they were already carrying a foretaste of it in their hearts, sharing it with one another. Before going to sleep at night they would sing, their voices blending in true and blissful harmony. Their songs spoke of all that the passing day had granted them to feel, they hallowed it and bid it farewell. They hallowed Nature, earth, sea and woods. They were fond of making up songs about one another, praising one another like children; they were the simplest of songs, but they came from the heart and stirred other hearts. Why songs alone? Their very lives were spent admiring one another. It was a sort of infatuation with one another, universal and complete. However, some of their other songs, solemn and exultant, I hardly understood at all. While understanding the words, I could never grasp their full meaning. It remained beyond my intelligence, as it were, yet instinctively my heart grew more and more responsive to it. I often told them that I had foreglimpsed this long, long ago; that all this happiness and glory had stirred a chord of anguished longing in me while on our own planet, mounting at times to unbearable sorrow; that I had foreglimpsed all of them and their glory in the dreams of my heart and the visions of my mind; that often I could not watch the sun go down on our earth without tears. . . . That my hatred for the people on our earth always held sadness: why could I not hate them without loving them, why could I not help forgiv-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

ing them, and why was there sadness in my love for them; why could I not love them without hating them? They listened to me, and I saw that they could not comprehend what I was telling them, but I was not sorry I had told them for I knew that they appreciated to the full the great yearning I felt for the ones I had left behind. When they turned their dear, loving gaze on me, when I felt that with them my heart became as innocent and truthful as theirs, it sufficed me, and I was not sorry I did not understand them. I was speechless with the fullness of life, and could only worship them in silence.

Oh, everyone laughs in my face now and says that one could never dream of all those details I am narrating now, that in my dream I could have seen and felt nothing but a mere sensation of something conceived by my own heart in delirium, and as for the details I must have made them up on awakening. And when I admitted to them that it may really have been so—oh Lord, the way they laughed in my face, the fun they had at my expense! Yes, of course, I was overcome by the mere sensation of my dream, and that alone survived in my wounded, bleeding heart: as for the actual images and shapes, that is, those I had really seen in my dream, they were so perfect in their harmony, charm and beauty and were so true, that our feeble words naturally failed me to describe them on awakening, and they were bound to become blurred in my mind. Therefore, I may indeed have been compelled to make up the details afterwards though unconsciously, distorting them of course, especially since I was so impatient and eager to give them some sort of expression. But then how can I doubt that it all was like this? It was a thousand times better perhaps, brighter and happier than I am telling it. Granted it was a dream, but all of this was, it had to be. Do you know, I shall tell you a secret: it may not have been a dream at all! Because something happened next, something so horribly true that it could never come to one even in a dream. Granted my heart conceived that dream, but could my heart alone have been able to conceive that appalling reality which befell me next? How could I have made it up by myself, how could my heart prompt that dream? Surely my shal-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by MoE-IKS-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

low heart and my whimsical, wretched mind could not have been elevated to such revelations of the truth? Oh, judge for yourselves: I concealed it until now, but now I shall disclose this truth as well. The fact is that I ... I corrupted them all!

V

Yes, yes, it ended in my corrupting them all! I do not know how it could have happened, but I remember perfectly that it did. My dream sped across thousands of years and left with me only an impression of it as a whole. I only know that it was I who caused their downfall. Like a malignant trichina, an atom of the plague afflicting whole kingdoms, so I spread contamination through all that happy earth, sinless before I came to it. They learned to lie and came to love lying, appreciating the beauty of lies. Oh, it may have begun quite *innocently*, with laughter, coquetry, playful love, or it really may have been the atom of lying seeping into their hearts and appealing to them. Soon after, sensuality was born, sensuality conceived jealousy, and jealousy conceived cruelty.... Oh, I don't know, I can't remember, but soon, very soon blood was shed for the first time: they were astounded and horrified, and began to separate and go different ways. They formed unions, but the unions were inimical to one another. Reproaches and recriminations began. They came to know shame and made a virtue of it. They learned the meaning of honour, and each union flew its own colours. They became cruel to their beasts who retreated from them into the forests and turned hostile. A struggle ensued for division, for sovereignty, for personal prominence, for thine and mine. They now spoke different tongues. They tasted of sorrow and came to love sorrow, they thirsted for sufferings and said that only through suffering could Truth be attained. And then science was introduced. When they grew evil, they began to talk of fraternity and humanity and understood these precepts. When they grew criminal they invented the idea of justice and in order to maintain it prescribed for themselves vo-

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

 Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

luminous codes of law, and to add security to these codes they erected a guillotine. They had but a vague memory of what they had lost, and even refused to believe that once they had been innocent and happy. The very thought that they could have once been so happy made them laugh, and they called it a dream. They could not even envisage it in images and shapes, but strangely and miraculously, though they had lost all faith in their former happiness calling it a fairy-tale, they so wanted to become innocent and happy again that they succumbed to their heartfelt wish like children and, deifying this wish, they put up numerous temples and began to pray to their own idea, or rather their "wish", knowing full well that it could never come true or be granted to them, but adoring and worshipping it in tears nonetheless. And yet, if it had been possible to restore them to the innocent and happy realm they had lost, or if someone could have given them a glimpse of it again and asked them whether they would like to come back to it, they would have probably refused. They told me: "Let us be deceitful, evil and unjust, but we *know* it, we weep over it, and torment ourselves for it, and the punishment we inflict upon ourselves is even harsher perhaps than that which will be meted out to us by the merciful Judge who will sit in judgement over us and whose name we do not know. We possess science, and through it we shall seek and find the Truth once again, and this time we shall apprehend it consciously. Knowledge is superior to feeling, consciousness of life is superior to life. Science will give us wisdom, wisdom will determine the laws, and knowledge of the laws of happiness is superior to happiness." This is what they said to me, and after saying it each one loved himself above all others, nor could he have done differently. Each one protected his ego so jealously, that he directed all his strivings towards humiliating and belittling the ego of others: and this became his life's work. Next came slavery, there was voluntary slavery as well: the weak willingly submitted to the strong only so they should help them to crush those even weaker than themselves. There were the righteous who came to these people and in tears spoke to them of their arrogance, of their loss of

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

all sense of measure and harmony, all shame. But the righteous were mocked and stoned. Holy blood stained the thresholds of temples. Men appeared in their stead who began to contrive how best to unite everyone once again but in such a manner that each should continue loving himself above all others and yet should not stand in the others' way, so that all could once more live together in apparently good agreement. Great wars were fought because of this idea. Though engaged in warfare, the fighters firmly believed that science, wisdom and the instinct of self-preservation would eventually force mankind to unite into a society that was concordant and sensible, and in the meantime in order to speed matters up, the "wise" tried to exterminate the unbelievers in their idea and the "unwise" as quickly as possible so they should not impede the idea's triumph. But the instinct of self-preservation soon began to weaken, and men pandering to their arrogance or sensuality demanded outright: all or nothing. To acquire all they resorted to crime and if that failed—to suicide. Religions were next introduced with a cult of non-existence and self-destruction for the sake of eternal peace in nonentity. The people were at last worn out with their senseless toil, and suffering shadowed their faces; and they proclaimed that suffering was beauty, for in suffering alone lay thought. They extolled suffering in their songs. I walked among them, wringing my hands and weeping over them; my love for them was even greater perhaps than before when their faces showed no suffering and they were innocent and so beautiful. I came to love the earth defiled by them even more than I did when it was a paradise, solely because grief had come to it. Alas, I have always loved sorrow and grief, but for my own self, for myself alone, while over them I wept in pity. I held my arms out to them in despair, accusing, cursing and despising myself. I told them that I had done it all, I alone; that it was I who brought them this germ of corruption, iniquity and deceit. I implored them to crucify me, I taught them how to make the cross. I could not, I had not the strength to kill myself, but I wanted to suffer at their hands, I longed for suffering, longed for my blood to be drained drop by drop in these sufferings.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

But they just laughed at me and finally came to regard me as a saintly fool. They made excuses for me, saying that they had received only what they had been asking for, that what they had now could not have been otherwise. At last they declared that I was becoming a danger to them, and that they would lock me up in the madhouse if I did not keep quiet. At this, sorrow gripped my heart so fiercely that I could not breathe, I felt that I was dying, and then . . . that was when I woke up.

It was already day, or rather day had not yet dawned but it was after five. I awoke in my armchair; my candle had burnt out, the captain's room was locked in sleep, and a silence unusual for our house reigned about me. I instantly leapt to my feet in amazement: nothing even remotely like this had ever happened to me before, not any of the trifling details that did not really matter such as falling asleep in my chair, for instance. And suddenly, as I stood there recovering my senses, I saw my revolver lying all ready and loaded before me. With a quick thrust I pushed it away. No, give me life now, life! I raised my arms and invoked the eternal Truth, or rather wept, for all my being was roused to exultation, immeasurable exultation. Yes, I wanted to live and spread the Word. My resolution to preach came on the instant, to preach now and for ever, of course. I shall preach, I must preach—what? Truth. For I have seen it, seen it with my own eyes, seen it in all its glory.

And so I have been spreading the Word ever since. What is more, the ones who laugh at me are dearer to me now than all the others. Why it is so I do not know nor can explain, but let it be so. They say that I am floundering already, that is, if I am floundering so badly now how do I expect to go on? It's perfectly true, I am floundering and it may become even worse as I go on. There is no doubt that I will indeed flounder and lose my way more than once before I learn how best to preach, that is with what words and by what deeds, for it is a very difficult mission. It's all as clear as day to me even now, you know; but, listen, who of us does not flounder? And yet

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

everyone is going towards the same thing, at least all strive for the same thing, all—from the wise man to the meanest wretch—only all follow different paths. It's an old truth, but here's something new: I cannot flounder too badly, you know. Because I have seen the Truth, I have seen it and I know that people can be beautiful and happy without losing their ability to dwell on this earth. I cannot and will not believe that evil is man's natural state. And yet it's just this conviction of mine that makes them all laugh at me. How could I help believing it, though: I have seen the Truth, it was not a figment of my imagination or my mind, I have seen it, seen it, and its *living image* has taken hold of my soul for ever. I have seen it in such consummate wholeness that I refuse to believe that it cannot live among men. And so, how could I lose my way? I shall stray once or twice of course, I shall perhaps even use the words of others sometimes, but not for long: the living image of what I have seen will remain with me always, it will always correct me and put me straight. I am full of vigour and strength. I shall go and preach, be it for a thousand years. Do you know, I first wanted to conceal the fact that I had corrupted them all, but that would have been a mistake—a mistake already, you see. Truth whispered in my ear that I was *lying*. Truth saved me and showed me the way. But I do not know how to build a paradise on earth, for I do not know how to put it in words. I lost the words on awakening. At least all the most important words, the most essential. Never mind; I shall go on my way and preach tirelessly, because I have seen it with my own eyes, even though I cannot describe what I have seen. That is something the mockers fail to understand. They say: "It was just a dream, ravings and hallucinations." Oh dear! Is that clever? And they are so proud of themselves, too. A dream, they say. But what is a dream? Isn't our life a dream? I shall go further: let it never, never come true, let paradise never be (after all, I do realise that!), I shall anyway go and spread the Word. And yet it could be done so simply: in a single day, in a *single hour* everything would be settled! One should love others as one loves oneself, that is the main thing, that is all, nothing

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

else, absolutely nothing else is needed, and then one would instantly know how to go about it. It's nothing but an old truth, repeated and read billions of times, and yet it has not taken root. "Consciousness of life is superior to life, knowledge of the laws of happiness is superior to happiness"—this is what we must fight against. And I shall. If only everyone wanted it, it could be all done at once.

*

As for that little girl, I have found her.... I shall go on my way! Yes, I shall go!

REQUEST TO READERS

Progress Publishers would be glad to have your opinion of this book, its translation and design.

Please send your comments to 21, Zubovsky Boulevard, Moscow, USSR.

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

Rs 8 P 00

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant

Gandhi Memorial College Of Education Bantalab Jammu

In 1973 Progress Publishers commenced publication of the **Russian Classics Series**. This series will offer the reader English translations of novels by such famous writers as Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, and Tolstoy, the poetry of Pushkin and Lermontov, the biting satire of Gogol and Saltykov-Shchedrin, and the brilliant short stories of Chekhov, Leskov and Korolenko. It will also include anthologies of Russian poetry from the eighteenth to the twentieth century and collections of stories and plays by other great Russian poets and writers of the nineteenth century. The books will contain illustrations by famous artists of the past and present. Each volume will be provided with an introductory article.

The following books will appear in 1977:

F. Dostoyevsky ● **THE IDIOT. BOOK I**

F. Dostoyevsky ● **THE IDIOT. BOOK II**

F. Dostoyevsky ● **THE INSULTED AND HUMILIATED**

V. Korolenko ● **SELECTED STORIES**

M. Lermontov ● **SELECTED WORKS**

I. Turgenev ● **FATHERS AND SONS**

CC-0 Agamnigam Digital Preservation Foundation,Chandigarh.Funding by IKS-MoE-2025-Grant